COPYING A MISTAKE

Alan Herbert's book, <u>Coin Clinic</u> (Iola, 1995) p. 54, indicates that a unique 1855 \$50 BLAKE & CO (spelled in the text as "Blake and Co") pioneer gold piece with the coin screw press obverse design is in the John J. Ford collection. No such piece however is known to exist. This error seems to have resulted from an error in Donald H. Kagin's book Private <u>Gold Coins and Patterns of the United States</u> (New York City, 1981) in which on page 281 there is a description of such a piece using the reverse legend of BLAKE & CO, but the accompanying illustration shows that the piece actually has BLAKE & AGNELL on the reverse.

Thus Herbert seems to have unknowingly relied on the erroneous text in the reference. This is just another example of someone continuing an error from a prior publication and exposing the source. This not only compounds the error but verifies the chronological order of the same error for those researching the matter. This is comparable to misspelling of the name BLAKE & AGNELL in 1912 by Edgar H. Adams and the identical misspelling on coins and bars first appearing in the 1950s.

FROM: ERIC & EVELYN NEWMAN PHONE NO.: 314 7270820 Aug. 22 2000 11:33AM P1
FROM: MONEY MUSEUM FAX NO.: 3145165903 Aug. 12 2000 01:35PM P2

How this unique piece is one of the heaviest recorded pieces when no other recorded pieces are known is difficult to understand.

The only other available information on this item came from Peter D. Mitchell of Conference of London.

A.H. Baldwin & Sons little in 1974. He wrote that this piece was obtained by Mr.

Crowther of Spinks and Brian Grover (both coin dealers) "from an impeccable source in the City (Godfather of one of the Queen's children and all that)." Crowther was said to have placed it in the Leu sale and that John Ford had it withdrawn as a forgery, the reason for which Grover told Mitchell was that Ford pronounced the family's letter giving details of the piece's history as false. Grover then sent the G. BLAKE ASSAYER piece to Lester Merkin in New York City and it was stolen from Merkin. The piece was later recovered by the police, held for evidence, and eventually returned by Merkin to Grover in England. Grover still had possession of the piece in 1974 and promised Mitchell he(Grover) would look for the Sanity letter and send Mitchell a copy. The name of the family was never disclosed. The copy of the letter never appeared.

and bid was refused by the sucresses and sucresses and bid was refused by the sucresses and sucresses and bid was refused by the sucresses are possessed as house.

A remarkable coincidence occurred at the above mentioned 1962 Bank Leu auction. The only other U.S. pioneer piece in the auction other than the G. BLAKE.

ASSAYER piece was an 1853 US Assay Office \$20 gold piece with its condition described as "Fleur du Coin" or proof (Lot # 1008). This piece is one of the same variety and in the same proof-like condition (generally known as a "Franklin heard" piece) as

#

G. BLAKE, ASSAYER, 1854

In Donald Kagin's 1981 book entitled Private Gold Coins and Patterns of the United States it is stated that Gorham Blake opened an assay office in 1854 in Sacramento, California where he issued ingots bearing the name "G. Blake Assayer". However, no such ingots or coins containing Blake's first name or initial are described, illustrated or otherwise mentioned in the book, but pieces dated 1855 and thereafter bearing the BLAKE & CO and BLAKE & AGNELL names were included. With one exception, Breen and other writers either before or after 1981 do not describe, mention, or illustrate any coin, bar, ingot, or other item with Blake's first name or initial in the legend or any Blake related item with an 1854 date.

That exception is a listing and illustration of a piece in the catalog of Bank Leu and Adolph Hess AG for an auction sale in Lucerne, Switzerland held October 17-18 1962, Lot # 1007, where the following description was used:

"California Gold. GORHAM BLAKE, ASSAYER Sacramento. \$ 33.68, Ingot 1854
G. BLAKE/ASSAYER/SAC. CAL. Rv. 33.68 (inkus) DOLLS. / 900 (inkus) THOUS.
/1854, in Linienviereck, 57.3 g. Unique, Extremely fine. This is the first example of Gorham Blake's name alone on an ingot and it is one of the heaviest recorded. This ingot has been in the possession of one family for at least 50 years."

The translation of the German word *inkus* is incuse and the word *Linienviereck* is rectangular.

OPINIONS ON BLAKE & AGNELL PIECES

The New Netherlands Coin Co., Inc., proposed a first draft (no other draft known) of a report entitled Blake & Agnell Pioneer Coiners and Assayers of Sacramento, 1854-1862, and apparently sent it in 1953 to Emery May Norweb, a collector of Cleveland, Ohio, in connection with the sale by or through New Netherlands to her of a Blake & Agnell gold strip or bar dated 1855 with three separate identical stampings in a horizontal row for \$25 size gold bars and described in detail on page 3 of that report and as item 4 on the following page of the report. The original of that report was sent to Eric P. Newman Numismatic Education Society by Henry Norweb (Husband of Emery May Norweb) on November 27, 1968 in connection with a Norweb request for an opinion on the authenticity of the above mentioned gold strip because of the research undertaken by that Society in connection with the Garland vs. Ryan arbitration involving an 1853 \$20 U.S.A.O.G. gold piece. The strip itself was also sent to that Society for study.

The New Netherlands report consists of 5 typewritten pages and is divided into two sections: (I) Historical Background and (II) the Known Issues of Blake & Agnell and Blake & Co. There are 10 pieces described in section II.

Some unusual features of that report are as follows:

- (A) The name Agnell is mentioned six times as part of the lettering on numismatic items and eight additional times in descriptive language. The name Agrell is never used. There is no indication that the name Agnell was a misspelling of the name Agrell.
- (B) The first name of the person referred to as Agnell is indicated as unknown although the name John Agrell is published on December 29, 1855 etc. in the *Sacramento Union* newspaper.
- (C) The middle initial of Gorham P. Blake is stated as newspaper content but does not seem to appear in a then current newspaper.
- (D) A \$20.15 Blake & Agnell rectangular ingot dated 1854 is included whereas the Blake & Agrell("now prepared to assay") partnership was announced in the newspaper Sacramento Union as beginning on November 12, 1855. There is no newspaper or other publication of that period which uses the name Blake & Agnell or Agrell.
- (E) The death of "Agnell" was said to have occurred on or about December 29, 1855 and reference was given to the publication of Edgar H. Adams (1911-1913) as the source. A dissolution of the co-partnership by "mutual consent" was announced on December 29, 1855 as of December 27, 1855 in the newspaper. Perhaps confusion came about from the publisher"s inserted duration signal which added (d 28-lw)" to the end of the dissolution announcement. No such date of death is indicated in the published study of Edgar H. Adams on pioneer gold (1911-1913).

- Breen (1987) bases his assertion of the December 29, 1855 date of death of Agrell on Kagin but Kagin's book (1981) does not mention the matter.
- (F) There is no mention of any G BLAKE ASSAYER gold bar dated 1854. This bar first appeared in a European auction in 1962 so New Netherlands was then familiar with it.
- (G) The number of equidistantly spaced concentric circles on the pieces described as Nos. 5,6,and 7 are respectively 18, 21, and 28, showing that the die maker would have had available in California a finely adjustable metal lathe during the 1855 period.
- (H) As to a Blake & Agnell unique \$25 rectangular ingot dated 1855 (No. 3) it is stated, "It is considered likely that other examples of this variety will turn up." This forecast is irresponsible and has a tendency to create suspicion.

(I) No discovery or source information or provenance of any item is furnished in spite of showing an extensive familiarity with pioneer gold history.

(J) It is suggested that the BLAKE & AGNELL strip of three separate horizontal stampings was already underweight to cut into three \$25 size bars and that this reject was kept as a souvenir by the assayers. The assayers could easily remelt the whole bar or cut off two full weight segments for \$25 bars. For assayers to keep a bar of that value as a souvenir with the misspelled name of AGNELL on it sees (farfetched?) (illogical?).

The opinion of the Eric P. Newman Numismatic Education Society as to the Blake and Agnell gold strip dated 1855 with three identical separate horizontal stampings was sent to the Norwebs on June 18, 1969 and contained the following major observations:

- (AA) That the souvenir status of the strip because it was slightly under weight to be cut into three \$25 size pieces was unjustified because it could easily be remelted or two pieces of full weight could easily have been cut from it and the remaining underweight portion could be remelted. An assayer keeping a souvenir of that value and easily reproducible with a misspelled name on it seems to be pure hype.
- (BB) No information as to the discovery, source or provenance of the strip was furnished in the detailed report or otherwise.
- (CC) It was pointed out that in the July 1959 advertisement of New Netherlands Coin Co., Inc., in <u>The Numismatist</u> that the advertisers had the "good fortune to devise a system of unearthing numerous unique pieces not previously known". Forecasting the future not only was unreliable insight but forecasting the finding of unique pieces seems not justifiable at all.
- (DD) The same advertisement stated that "we have handled the most fabulous items imaginable". The word "fabulous" may be an advertising puff, but fabulous means unreal.
- (EE) It was pointed out that Paul Franklin and John J. Ford, Jr. for many years had a business relationship, were close friends, and lived in communities close to each other in Long Island, NY.

(FF) It was pointed out that Paul Franklin was the source of the previously unknown Parsons bar from Colorado and the source of the previously unknown Blake & Co. gold pieces struck with circular dies.

(GG) It was pointed out that Paul Franklin testified at the Garland vs. Ryan arbitration hearings that he was a skilled machinist and he gave full

technical details of his knowledge of electrotyping.

(HH) It was pointed out that Paul Franklin refused to testify at the Garland vs. Ryan arbitration hearings as to the source of the 1853 \$20 U.S.A.O.G. gold coins, one of which was the coin under consideration at those hearings.

(II) It was pointed out that John J. Ford, Jr. had told Eric P. Newman that Paul

Franklin was the finest metallurgist that Ford had ever known.

described as "Fleur du Coin" or proof (Lot # 1008). This piece is one of the same variety and in the same proof-like condition (generally known as a "Franklin hoard" piece) as one which was the subject of a PNG (Professional Numismatic Guild) arbitration award in 1968 in which it was determined unanimously that the coin was not a proof and its sale as a proof was a misrepresentation justifying the return of the purchase price to the buyer by the seller. Other 1853 \$20 U.S.A.O.G. gold pieces of the same variety and proof-like condition were stated to be counterfeit (fake) by Richard S. Montgomery (Rick Montgomery) on page 289 of the portion written by him in the book, The Official Guide to Coin Grading and Counterfeit Detection (New York City, 1997). Montgomery is referred to in that book as president of PCGS (Professional Coin Grading Service) and "considered by many to be the number one counterfeit coin detection expert in the world." Thus it can be observed that the close association of the G BLAKE ASSAYER ingot dated 1854 and the 1853 USAOG \$20 piece in proof-like condition side by side in the same European auction catalog, being the only pieces of U.S. pioneer gold offered there might well have had some mutual prior relationship or source. One piece was withdrawn from that auction as a fake and the other was of the same type as an example declared to be a fake by an outstanding, reliable authenticator.

¹ Two arbitrators(one appointed by Garland and one by mutual consent) believed the 1853 \$20 USAOG piece was a forgery, but the third arbitrator (appointed by Ryan) did not agree. The desire to have a unanimous decision rather than a 2-1 decision was preferred and thus the difference of opinion among arbitrators was avoided.

In a July 2000 Internet communication Robert Leonard included comments on the misspelling of the pioneer gold assayer partnership of Blake and Agrell as "Blake & Agnell". This error was previously mentioned in both Walter Breen's Complete

Encyclopedia (1988), p. 651, and in Donald Kagin's Private Gold Coins of the United

States (1981), p. 151. The spelling error is not mentioned in the catalogs of Don Taxay,

Wayte Raymond or Yeoman-Bressett that had pieces with "BLAKE & AGNELL"

misspelling included.

An analysis of available facts and previous written comments seem desirable to review since Leonard specifically challenges the authenticity of the \$23.30 "BLAKE & AGNELL" bar.

Due also to Theodore V. Buttery's general challenge during the 1996-1999 period to the authenticity of a group of pioneer gold pieces appearing after 1950 and Michael Hodder's views in the 1998-2000 period to the contrary the misspelling of "BLAKE & AGNELL" on pioneer gold pieces seems significant.

The spelling error "Blake & Agnell" in printed text form first appeared in 1913 on page 108 of the five part studies of U.S. pioneer gold pieces written by Edgar H. Adams for the American Journal of Numismatics which studies have often been reprinted. There was only that one use of the name Agnell by him whether spelled correctly or incorrectly. Edgar H. Adams in his publication did include the 1856 \$20 circular trial coinage in copper and brass for Blake & Co. using the name in the coronet on the obverse. He was

unaware of any piece bearing the legend BLAKE & AGNELL, BLAKE & AGRELL, or any other piece bearing the name of AGNELL or AGRELL; otherwise he would have included it in his meticulous undertaking. The detail in the historical part of his text indicated his familiarity with an extensive number of sources covering western assayers, coiners, mining, etc. beginning prior to 1848 and running through the Gold Rush decade. He obviously knew of the partnership of Blake & Agrell (composed of Gorham Blake and John Agrell) which existed for only 45 days from November 12, 1855 to December 27, 1855 according to several newspaper entries. After Blake & Agrell dissolved, a new partner, W.R. Waters was substituted by Blake for Agrell to create the firm of Blake & Co. The known 19th century sources uniformly spell the Agrell name correctly. The misspelling in 1913 was apparently made by the typesetter mistaking "r" for "n" which could easily have taken place in transcription due to their somewhat similar written appearance whether in long hand or typewritten. Proof reading did not catch the error.

RAYMOND CATALOGS

In <u>The Standard Catalogue of U.S. Coins</u> by Wayte Raymond there was no mention of either "Blake & Co." or "Blake & Agnell" pieces until the 17th edition copyrighted in 1954 and dated 1954-55. In its two page introduction to "Private Gold Issues" it is stated that "There are also a great number of patterns and so-called patterns (some of which are undoubtedly modern) of these issues, some bearing the names of companies about which no contemporary references can be found, others being varieties of issues known to be authentic". There are included and illustrated under "Blake & Co, Sacramento 1855, 56" illustrations of two circular pieces, as follows:

- (I) A coin screw press design 1855 \$20 on the obverse and a lathe turned design with BLAKE & CO ASSAYERS and 20 on the reverse weighing 507.7 grains. Its weight is 507.7 grains. It is further described as "2 known, one of these is misstruck and looped."
- (II) A 1856 dated piece with a female head facing left with a coronet reading BLAKE & CO SACRAMENTO CALIFORNIA TWENTY D on the reverse.

The associate editor was John J. Ford, Jr. with research by Walter Breen.

In the 18th and last edition copyright 1957 the two pieces under BLAKE & CO remain the same except the comment about the 1855 dated piece is changed to "The first specimen was unearthed by John J. Ford Jr. in 1953, the second in 1954." John J. Ford.

Jr. 's status as to the book was described as "Editor Consultation and Supervision" while Breen was described as "Compilation and Basic Research". The word "unearthed" can be interpreted either as "archeologically located" or as "discovered" but it is not clear which was intended as no further detail was stated. Later comments by Ford indicate further confusion as the coins are said by Ford to be brought to him by Paul Franklin.

THE RED BOOK

In the Yeoman-Bressett 9th edition of the Red Book for the year 1956 the first "BLAKE & AGNELL" bar or ingot is included (p. 212) and consists of a piece dated 1855 with a \$23.30 value struck into it by punch. This listing remained unchanged until the 13th edition for the year 1960 when three new pieces and some historical data were added. The new pieces were (a) an 1855 rectangular bar or ingot with the misspelled name BLAKE & AGNELL and with the denomination \$25.00 die struck on the obverse; (b) an 1855 \$20 circular piece having a coin screw press on the obverse and with BLAKE & CO. die struck upon the reverse and with the \$20 denomination punched in on both obverse and reverse; and (c) a mention of the 1856 \$20 circular trial piece in non-precious metal with BLAKE & CO in the coronet on the obverse. This situation remained virtually unchanged until the 19th edition for the year 1966 when all BLAKE & AGNELL as well as BLAKE & CO. pieces were entirely eliminated. Those eliminated pieces have never been reinstated in the Yeoman-Bressett catalog.

THE TAXAY BOOK

During his five years of preparation of The Comprehensive Catalog and

Encyclopedia of United States Coins (Omaha 1970) Don Taxay was in continual contact with U. S. pioneer gold research and researchers. He illustrated as item 99 on plate 105 of his book an 1855 \$25 rectangular "BLAKE & AGNELL" bar but in the text description (p. 358) misdates it as 1856. He was apparently unaware of or rejected the existence of an 1855 \$50 circular "BLAKE & AGNELL" piece struck on a rectangular gold bar with circular dies or he would have described and illustrated it as he did the 1855 \$20 circular "BLAKE & CO." piece with an identical die. He was also unaware of the correct spelling of the partnership name of Blake & Agrell as he uses the name "Agnell" three times (p. 352) showing that he believed it was the correct spelling of the name. His unawareness of or rejection of the 1855 "Blake & Agnell" \$50 piece is unusual in that it was or had been held by the same person indicated as owner of the 1855 \$25 rectangular "BLAKE & AGNELL" bar and one or both of the 1855 \$20 circular BLAKE & CO. pieces. (See Breen for ownership confirmation).

Taxay also stated that there were bars made in 1854 under the name G BLAKE ASSAYER but did not describe or illustrate any.

Taxay also stated that he knew of a number of 1856 dated "Blake & Co." assay bars (p. 352) but he did not give any source of his information or describe or illustrate them, possibly because these items were not coins and therefore not within the scope of his book. Whether they were of the type found in the salvage from S.S. Central America in the 1980s and 1990s or otherwise is not determinable from his work.

THE KAGIN BOOK

Kagin in his Private Gold Coins publication of 1981 appears to be the first to mention the misspelling of the name Agrell as "Agnell" (p. 171). Kagin indicates the mistake of one letter on the dies might not have been practical to correct, "especially when they were a large company known by most citizens in Sacramento." He shows two dies with the "BLAKE & AGNELL" name misspelled, one for round pieces and one for rectangular pieces. None are known with the name spelled correctly or in any other way. Kagin's suggestion seems unsupported and unjustified because the partnership was only in business for 45 days altogether, which is too short a time to be "known by most citizens". The Blake name might have acquired a fine assaying reputation beginning in 1854 but the Agrell name regardless of spelling was only a flicker of light and was not known on any coins, ingots, or bars prior to the BLAKE & AGRELL partnership. Kagin points out as an excuse that SCHULTS was misspelled on another pioneer coin when a terminal "S" punch was used instead of "Z".

Further review of the matter in Kagin reveals that he lists as his K-3 variety an 1855 \$50 rectangular planchet BLAKE & CO. piece that uses a circular die with the screw press obverse device (p. 281). The reverse illustration for that piece shows a "BLAKE & AGNELL" legend and does not conform to the text wording. This mistake is further compounded in his description of his K-4 variety (p. 282) which is round and he states that both the obverse and reverse are similar to his K-2 variety which is different in shape, legend and design. To add to the confusion in the description of K-3 it is stated that an uncut strip of three \$25 size ingots exists but this presumably relates to K-1 and not to K-3. Kagin also describes under the subtitle "Patterns, Die Trials & Experimental

Pieces" (p. 323), a group of six Blake & Co. pieces (pp. 334-336). These consist of three unique 1855 pieces with the screw press design struck in other than gold; one 1856 \$20 circular pattern described and illustrated by Edgar H. Adams in 1913; and two unique undated rectangular white metal bars with much of its text impressed in curved lines and cancelled with large X marks scratched on the faces. None of these pieces are included in the Kagin index. Even though they do not relate to the misspelling problem directly they must be studied because some of them are associated by die and punch linkage to the \$50 BLAKE & AGNELL piece which does have the misspelling.

Any such inaccuracies in Kagin's book should not detract materially from his many other research findings.

BLAKE RELATED MATERIAL IN THE JOSIAH K LILLY-SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION HOLDINGS

After Josiah K. Lilly died his enormous collection of gold coins was appraised by Abe Kosoff and Hans M.F. Schulman in September 1967. An Act if Congress was passed providing that the Lilly Estate would receive \$5,500,000 estate tax credit if his gold collection were donated to the Smithsonian Institution. The donation was made. The four Blake related items included were as follows:

BLAKE & AGNELL

Ingot, \$20.15. This company had its smelting and assaying plant at 52 J Street in Sacramento.

BLAKE & COMPANY

Pattern in Gold. \$20 1855. Formerly Blake & Agnell. A unique item acquired by Stack's from a Mr. F. Korff of Mesa, Arizona.

BLAKE & COMPNY

Ingot, silver, \$3.04 Ex-Don C. Kiefer Collection

Ingot, silver, \$14.48, No. 326 Ex- Kiefer, New Netherlands Coin Co., Gerald Fox.

It can be observed that the misspelled word "Agnell" is used both as to the lettering on the coin and in the description of the firm name. It will also be noted that the word COMPANY is spelled out instead of being abbreviated, but this is only a technical error.

The existence of F. Korff of Mesa, Arizona has been extensively researched in records for that area including telephone books, directories, licenses, land records, voting records, etc. and no such person has been found. Repeated requests from the Smithsonian Institution for a complete copy of the Lilly records have been requested for many years by several people and have not resulted in being furnished with the records. Efforts under the Freedom of Information Act met with a refusal on the grounds that those records did not belong to the Smithsonian Institution and were returned to the Estate of Josiah K. Lilly. Nevertheless copies of most of those records are available in private hands. Messrs. Kosoff and Schulman also failed to cooperate in making them available.

Subsequent to the Lilly transfer, a BLAKE & AGNELL strip of three \$25 size horizontal stampings (in gold?) was given to the Smithsonian Institution by Emery May Norweb. There may be others.

S.S. CENTRAL AMERICA

Publicity to date about the immense amount of bars and coins salvaged from the S.S. Central America has not mentioned any item with the name BLAKE & AGNELL or BLAKE & AGRELL or AGNELL or AGRELL. The Sotheby Auction of 1999-2000 included only about 8 % of the find and that portion has 15 assay bars of BLAKE & CO. The Sotheby catalog (pp. 84-87) mentions the name John Agrell in the historical section. As to the remaining 92% of the treasure another 19 more BLAKE & CO. assay bars exist. None so far show similarity to letter and number punchers on the BLAKE & AGNELL pieces which began to appear in the 1950s.

THE BREEN ENCYCLOPEDIA

Walter Breen's Encyclopedia had the advantage of using all of the work and writing of prior researchers to which he added his own. He included all of the "BLAKE & AGNELL" pieces with the warning: "if authentic" (p. 651). He specifically agreed that the Edgar H. Adams use of "BLAKE & AGNELL" was a typographical error. He recognized the importance that "BLAKE & AGNELL" coins; bars or ingots were not known until the 1950s and concludes "strange indeed to find it (the misspelling of AGNELL) on the coins, which were unknown until the 1950s!" His astonishment in the sequence of events in having the misspelling AGNELL occur in print in 1913 and the identical misspelling being found on coins and bars in the 1950s is indicated by his use of an exclamation point at the end of his comment. Breen for some reason omitted from his 1988 encyclopedia any mention or illustration of five unique trial pieces in copper or white metal described on pp. 334-336 of Kagin's 1981 book under a Blake & Co. caption. The obverse of three of these bear the 1855 date; have a circular impression showing the screw press design; and the portion of the field for punching in the denomination numerals remains flat.

If these pieces dated 1855 were trial impressions they would probably not have been BLAKE & CO pieces but those of its predecessor firm for which a reverse die was made with the allegedly misspelled name of BLAKE & AGNELL in the legend.

Otherwise the alleged BLAKE & AGNELL reverse would not have had an obverse.

The other two are rectangular bars, the obverse of each bearing the date 1856, the name of BLAKE & CO., and a place where their value is to be punched in.

The name BLAKE & CO is punched on the reverse of several of them. Their similarity to material Breen included is sufficient so that one would expect their mention by him.

Whether he excluded these five pieces because he felt that they were false or failed to include them because they were omitted from Kagin's index is not certain.

SCREWPRESS DESIGN

Curiously there is no listed or known example of an 1855 dated circular gold coin with the coin screw press design and a punched in 20 as a denomination on the obverse and the BLAKE & AGNEKK legend and a punched in 20 as a denomination on the reverse. Such a pair of dies without a punched in denomination is obviously inferred to have existed since a striking of those dies on a thick rectangular bar with 50 subsequently punched in on each side does exist. The 20 would have been the normal punched in denomination because the circular size of the coin was identical to the standard U.S. \$20 gold coin of the Gold Rush period. BLAKE & CO was only in existence for 4 days in 1855. Yet two of the latter are in existence and one of them has or had a loop init from allegedly becoming a jewelry item. A loop is also found on the only alleged James King bar also. It would seem that if no \$20 denomination BLAKE & AGNELL gold coins are in existence or mentioned there would be little reason to make a new circular reverse die with the name changed to BLAKE & CO. when a new pair of circular dies looking much like the standard US \$20 coin and containing the name of BLAKE & CO and the date 1856 was ordered fro the East as Adams lists and illustrates as a pattern.

CONCLUSION

The chances of Edgar H. Adams in 1913 having his publication contain a spelling error identical to a spelling error in 1855 on coins and bars which Adams had never seen or heard of is virtually nil. A chronological copying order of an error of this type seems to become a logical conclusion since the 1913 spelling error came first and copying that error in the 1950s was an logical event occurring long afterward. Copying mistakes are often a proof of plagiarism or other improprieties as well as reliance upon previously published material.

SCOPE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The scope of the data assembled for this research project and covered by it is limited to items which include the name BLAKE and not that of other issues or issuers, not including that name specifically associated or related to BLAKE matters. There are many omitted pioneer gold observations which have a more distant association or need for an independent review.

If there are any statements in the foregoing data which are inaccurate or ambiguous, can be supplemented, clarified or improved upon, the writer welcomes such suggestions. If the project should be enlarged to include other pieces of pioneer gold the material for such items can be assembled individually or as a team effort.

Thanks are due to many who have over a long period of time shared their information with the writer and it is hoped that they and others will continue to do so. Those who have preferred for whatever reason to hold out information in the past are welcome to furnish it at any time.

No circulation or publication allowed.

August 2000

IMPORTANCE OF THE BLAKE & AGNELL MISSPELLING

In a July 2000 Internet communication Robert Leonard included comments on the misspelling of the pioneer gold assaying partnership of Blake and Agrell as "Blake & Agnell". This error was previously pointed out in Donald H. Kagin's <u>Private Gold Coins of the United States</u> (1981), p. 151 and in his 1979 doctoral dissertation, p. 212. <u>Walter Breen's Complete Encyclopedia</u> (1988), p. 651, also includes a discussion of the mistake. The spelling error was not mentioned in the catalogs of Don Taxay, Wayte Raymond or Yeoman-Bressett, each of which included pieces with the "BLAKE & AGNELL" misspelling.

An analysis of available facts and previous written comments seems desirable since Leonard specifically challenges the authenticity of an 1855 \$23.30 "BLAKE & AGNELL" gold bar.

During the 1996-1999 period Theodore V. Buttery undertook presentations challenging the authenticity of an unspecified group of pioneer gold pieces appearing after 1950 and Michael Hodder's presentations during the 1998-2000 period asserted a contrary position. Neither mentioned the misspelling of "BLAKE & AGNELL" on pioneer gold pieces although each includes references to the Blake & Agnell name.

The spelling error "Blake & Agnell" in printed text form first appeared in 1912 on page 108 of the five part studies of U.S. pioneer gold pieces written by Edgar H. Adams for the American Journal of Numismatics which studies have been reprinted. There was only one use of the name Agnell by him and no mention of the name Agrell. Edgar H. Adams in his publication did include the 1856 \$20 circular trial coinage in copper and

brass for Blake & Co. using the name in the coronet on the obverse. He was unaware of any piece bearing the legend BLAKE & AGNELL, BLAKE & AGRELL, or any other piece bearing the name of AGNELL or AGRELL; otherwise he would have included it in his meticulous undertaking. The detail in the historical part of his text indicated his familiarity with an extensive number of informational sources covering western assayers, coiners, mining, etc. beginning prior to 1848 and running through the Gold Rush period. He obviously knew of the partnership of Blake & Agrell (composed of Gorham Blake and John Agrell) which existed for only 45 days from November 12, 1855 to its dissolution on December 27, 1855 according to several newspaper announcements. After Blake & Agrell dissolved by mutual consent, a new partner, W.R. Waters was substituted by Blake for Agrell to create the firm of Blake & Co. Other than on the coins and bars under review all the known 19th century sources uniformly spell the Agrell name correctly. The misspelling in 1912 was apparently made by the typesetter mistaking "r" for "n" which could easily have taken place in transcription due to its somewhat similar written appearance whether in long hand or typewritten. Proof reading just did not catch the error for Adams.

A \$20.15 rectangular gold bar dated 1854 and with its four side surfaces stamped with BLAKE & AGNELL in raised lettering was reported about 1953. The name AGRELL was misspelled. The *Sacramento Union* newspaper announcement dated November 12, 1855 that BLAKE AND AGRELL "are now prepared and well qualified to execute business" is over 11 months after the use of the misspelled name on an 1854 dated bar. The authenticity of such a bar therefore creates a problem due to an 1854 date

of origin of the firm contradicting the date of November 12, 1855 announced for commencement of business as well as a misspelled firm name. Donald H. Kagin recognized the inconsistency by writing, "What is a mystery, however, is the existence of an 1854 BLAKE & AGNELL Gold Ingot" (Dissertation, 1979, p. 221, endnotes 60 and 65).

G. BLAKE, ASSAYER, 1854

In Kagin's 1981 book (p. 171) it is stated that Gorham Blake opened an assay office in 1854 in Sacramento, California where he issued ingots bearing the name "G. Blake Assayer". However, no such ingots or coins containing Blake's first name or initial are described, illustrated or otherwise mentioned in the book. There is no support given for the 1854 date assertion. Pieces dated 1855 and thereafter bearing the BLAKE & AGNELL and the BLAKE & CO names were included. With one exception, there is no written material to our knowledge either before or after Kagin's 1981 book that describes, mentions, or illustrates any coin, bar, ingot, or other tangible item with Blake's first name or initial in the legend.

That exception is the listing and illustration of a gold piece in the catalog of Bank Leu and Adolph Hess AG for an auction sale in Lucerne, Switzerland held October 17-18 1962, Lot # 1007, where the following description was given:

"California Gold. GORHAM BLAKE, ASSAYER Sacramento. \$ 33.68, Ingot 1854
G. BLAKE/ASSAYER/SAC. CAL. Rv. 33.68 (inkus) DOLLS. / 900 (inkus) THOUS.
/1854, in Linienviereck, 57.3 g. Unique, Extremely fine. This is the first example of
Gorham Blake's name alone on an ingot and it is one of the heaviest recorded. This ingot
has been in the possession of one family for at least 50 years."

The translation of the German word inkus means incuse and the word Linienviereck means rectangular.

How this unique piece is one of the heaviest recorded pieces when no other recorded pieces were known to exist is difficult to understand. If the comment related to other issuers then octagonal \$50 ingots coined by Humbert and the US Assay Office are routinely heavier as Kohler bars also are.

The only other information located as to this G. BLAKE ASSAYER item came from Peter D. Mitchell of A.H. Baldwin & Sons Ltd. of London in 1974. He wrote that this G BLAKE ASSAYER piece was obtained by Mr. Crowther of Spinks and Brian Grover (both London, England coin dealers) "from an impeccable source in the City (Godfather of one of the Queen's children and all that)." Crowther was said to have placed it in the Leu sale and that then John Ford had it withdrawn as a forgery, the reason for which Grover told Mitchell was that Ford pronounced the family's letter giving details of the piece's history as false. Grover then sent the G. BLAKE ASSAYER piece to Lester Merkin, a New York City coin dealer, and it was stolen from Merkin. The piece was later recovered by the police, held for evidence, and eventually returned by Merkin to Grover in England. Grover still had possession of the piece in 1974 and promised Mitchell that he (Grover) would look for the letter from the family about the piece and send Mitchell a copy. The name of the family was never disclosed to Mitchell. The copy of the letter never appeared.

A remarkable coincidence occurred at the above-mentioned 1962 Bank

Leu auction. The only other U.S. pioneer gold piece in the auction other than the G.

BLAKE ASSAYER piece dated 1854 was an 1853 US Assay Office \$20 gold piece with

its condition described as "Fleur du Coin" or proof (Lot # 1008). This piece was one of the same variety and in the same proof-like condition (generally known as a "Franklin hoard" piece) as one which was the subject of a PNG (Professional Numismatic Guild) arbitration award in 1968 in which it was determined unanimously that the coin was not a proof and its sale as a proof was a misstatement on the invoice justifying the return of the purchase price to the buyer by the seller. All of the 1853 \$20 U.S.A.O.G. gold pieces of the same variety and proof-like condition have been stated to be counterfeit (fake) by Richard S. Montgomery (Rick Montgomery) on page 289 of the portion written by him in the recent book, The Official Guide to Coin Grading and Counterfeit Detection (New York City, 1997). Montgomery is referred to in that book as president of PCGS (Professional Coin Grading Service) and "considered by many to be the number one counterfeit coin detection expert in the world." The published ANACS (American Numismatic Association Certification Service) opinion (The Numismatist, Feb. 1994, p. 290) has taken the same position. (See also Coin World, July 5, 1999, p. 72)

It can be observed that the close association of the G BLAKE ASSAYER ingot dated 1854 and the 1853 USAOG \$20 piece in proof-like condition side by side in the same Swiss auction catalog, being the only pieces of U.S. pioneer gold offered there, might well have had some prior mutual relationship or source. Thus one piece was withdrawn from that auction as a fake and the other piece was not sold for some reason. That other piece was from the same dies and in identical condition as a coin later declared to be a fake by reliable authenticators.

¹ Two arbitrators (one appointed by Garland and one by mutual consent of the arbitrators for each party to the dispute) believed the 1853 \$20 USAOG piece was a forgery, but the third arbitrator (appointed by Ryan) did not agree. The desire to have a unanimous decision rather than a 2-1 decision was selected and thus the difference of opinion among arbitrators in the final opinion was avoided.

On March 1-2, 1962, the same year as the Swiss auction above mentioned, both Crowther and Grover were also involved in the placement and "sale" of a false St.

Patrick's farthing struck in gold as Lot # 365 in an auction by Wallis & Wallis at Lewes, Sussex, England at which the farthing was alleged to have brought £ 500, the highest priced coin in the history of that auctioneer. It was said to have been bought by Spinks for whom Crowther worked. A request to see the underbidder's name and bid was refused by the auctioneer. That request was made to try to determine whether a wash sale in a rural English auction had occurred to create a false provenance and an artificial price.

Spinks sold the coin to Emery May Norweb. After her death it was withdrawn from the Bowers & Merena Auction of her collection held March 24-25, 1988, (Lot 2386) and donated to the American Numismatic Society for study.

The year 1962 was a busy one for the sale of forged American related pieces in European auctions. The fact that they were not auctioned in the United States is strange. Each piece was a major American rarity, if genuine. The G. BLAKE ASSAYER piece and the St. Patrick farthing in gold were previously unknown by the public. None of the pieces had a named provenance or consignor. Two were side by side in the same auction. The same numismatic professionals were involved in the submission of the pieces in two separate and unrelated auction sales about 6 months apart. Each piece was stated to be a forgery or fake at the time of the sale or thereafter, at least one and perhaps two being withdrawn from the original auction sale as false; the details of the sale, if any, of another being refused at the time of the original auction but being withdrawn from a 1988 auction sale; and the third being an identical companion to a piece subsequently declared to be a forgery.

The above factors do not seem to allow a reasonable person to reject the circumstances of guilt by association as to background or source of these pieces, whether a person chooses preponderance of evidence or beyond a reasonable doubt as a basis for reconfirming their lack of authenticity and their probable origin from a common source of forged pieces.

To add to the foregoing there is no evidence other than the G BLAKE ASSAYER ingot dated 1854 that Blake was an assayer in Sacramento in the year 1854 and up to November 12, 1855. He had arrived in California in 1852 and had been active in several gold related ventures, including gold dust buying, gold mine superintendence, and gold mine ownership. The *Sacramento Union* newspaper on November 12, 1855 carried an announcement that the Blake and Agrell partnership " are now prepared and well qualified to execute business" (melting, refining and assaying) and welcomed customers. The word "now" indicates a commencement date rather than a continuance of a prior business. They hired as an assayer, David Lundhom, who was working as First Assayer of Kellogg & Co. in San Francisco until it ceased business in October, 1855.

RAYMOND CATALOGS

In <u>The Standard Catalogue of U.S. Coins</u> by Wayte Raymond there was no mention of either "Blake & Co." or "Blake & Agnell" pieces until the 17th edition copyrighted in 1954 and dated 1954-55. In its two page introduction to "Private Gold Issues" it is stated that "There are also a great number of patterns and so-called patterns (some of which are undoubtedly modern) of these issues, some bearing the names of companies about which no contemporary references can be found, others being varieties

of issues known to be authentic". There are included and illustrated under "Blake & Co, Sacramento 1855, 56" illustrations of two circular pieces, as follows:

- (I) An 1855 \$20 size obverse with a coin screw press design and a lathe turned design with BLAKE & CO ASSAYERS on the reverse. The numerals 20 are punched in on each face. Its weight is 507.7 grains. It is further described as "2 known, one of these is misstruck and looped."
- (II) An obverse dated 1856 with a female head facing left and a coronet reading BLAKE & CO. On the reverse is SACRAMENTO CALIFORNIA TWENTY D.

The associate editor was John J. Ford, Jr. with research by Walter Breen.

The above mentioned "undoubtedly modern" pieces refers to pieces produced with equipment held by, available to or obtained from Stephen K. Nagy, a Philadelphia numismatic and antiquarian dealer who had close ties through relatives to a high official at the U.S. Mint in Philadelphia (William Idler).

In the 18th and last edition of Raymond's catalogs, copyrighted 1957, the two pieces under BLAKE & CO remain the same except the comment about the 1855 dated piece is changed to "The first specimen was unearthed by John J. Ford Jr. in 1953, the second in 1954." John J. Ford. Jr. 's status as to the 18th edition of the book was revised to "Editor Consultation and Supervision" while Breen was described as "Compilation and Basic Research". The word "unearthed" can be interpreted either as "archeologically located" or as "discovered" but it is not clear which was intended as no further detail was there stated.

In American Coin Treasures and Hoards (1997) by Q. David Bowers on p. 271 and in other oral and written statements it is said that John J. Ford, Jr. explained that "Franklin found the material and I researched and sold it." Ford continued to elaborate that "Franklin was not to tell me where he obtained his material***." This seems to leave credit for the discovery of the "unearthed" items in a somewhat contradictory status.

It can also be observed that the John J. Ford, Jr. flyer copyrighted in 1957 and soliciting correspondence and rubbings of western American numismatic related items were to be sent to his home but does not mention Franklin's name or address. Similarly the July 1959 advertisement in The Numismatist by New Netherlands Coin Co. Inc. (the employer of John J. Ford, Jr.) suggests to readers who have Western Numismatic Americana that "it will pay you to deal direct" and gives only the New York City address of New Netherlands for "offers, appraisals, correspondence, transactions". This and other advertising do not mention Franklin's name. No Franklin flyer or advertising is known.

The foregoing seems to cast doubt on the statement that Franklin "found" the material and turned it over to Ford for sale.

Both of the advertisements above mentioned prominently feature an illustration of both faces of the 1855 \$ 25 rectangular gold bar with the BLAKE & AGNELL misspelling. This type of piece will be commented upon subsequently.

THE RED BOOK

In the Yeoman-Bressett 9th edition of the "Red Book" for the year 1956 the first "BLAKE & AGNELL" bar or ingot is included (p. 212) and consists of a piece dated

1855 with a \$23.30 value struck into it by punch. This listing remained unchanged until the 13th edition for the year 1960 when three new pieces and some historical data were added. The new pieces were (a) an 1855 rectangular bar or ingot with the misspelled BLAKE & AGNELL name and with the denomination \$25.00 die struck on the obverse; (b) an 1855 dated \$20 size circular piece having a screw press on the obverse and with concentric circles and BLAKE & CO. upon the reverse and with 20 as a denomination punched in on both obverse and reverse; and (c) a mention of the 1856 \$20 circular trial piece in non-precious metal with BLAKE & CO on the coronet of the obverse. This situation remained virtually unchanged until the \$19th edition for the year 1966 when all BLAKE & AGNELL as well as BLAKE & CO. pieces were entirely eliminated. Those eliminated pieces have never been reinstated in the Yeoman-Bressett catalog.

In 1994 and thereafter the Yeoman-Bressett catalog has illustrated and described examples of BLAKE & CO and other assay bars salvaged from the wreck of S.S. Central America.

THE TAXAY BOOK

During his five years of preparation of <u>The Comprehensive Catalog and Encyclopedia of United States Coins</u> (Omaha 1970) Don Taxay was in continual contact with U. S. pioneer gold research and researchers. He illustrated as item 99 on plate 105 of his book an 1855 \$25 rectangular "BLAKE & AGNELL" bar but in the text description (p. 358) misdates it as 1856. He was either unaware of or rejected the inclusion of an 1855 \$50 "BLAKE & AGNELL" rectangular gold bar struck with circular dies or he would have described and illustrated it as he did the 1855 \$20 circular "BLAKE & CO."

piece using an identical obverse die. He was also unaware of the correct spelling of the partnership name of Blake & Agrell as he uses the name "Agnell" three times (p. 352) showing that he believed it was the correct spelling of the name. His unawareness of or rejection of the 1855 "Blake & Agnell" \$50 piece is unusual in that it had the same provenance (Ford, Bank of California) as the 1855 \$25 rectangular "BLAKE & AGNELL" bar and one of the 1855 \$20 circular BLAKE & CO. pieces. (See also Breen, p. 651, for ownership confirmation).

Taxay also stated that there were bars made in 1854 under the name G BLAKE ASSAYER (p. 352), but did not describe or illustrate any. He apparently was aware of the 1962 events as to such a bar.

Taxay also wrote that he knew of a number of 1856 dated "Blake & Co." assay bars (p. 352) but he did not give any source of his information or describe or illustrate any of them, possibly because these items were not coins and therefore not within the scope of his book. Whether they were of the type found in the salvage from S.S. Central America in the 1980s and 1990s or otherwise does not seem determinable from his work.

THE KAGIN BOOK

Kagin in his <u>Private Gold Coins</u> publication of 1981 (p. 171), and in his 1979 doctoral dissertation (p. 212) appears to be the first to mention the misspelling of the name Agrell as "Agnell". Kagin indicates the mistake of one letter on the dies might not have been practical to correct, "especially when they were a large company known by most citizens in Sacramento." He shows two dies with the "BLAKE & AGNELL" name misspelled, one being the round die and the other being the rectangular die. No pieces

have the name spelled correctly or in any other variation of the misspelling. Kagin's suggestion seems unsupported and unjustified because the partnership was only in business for 45 days altogether, which is too short a time to be "known by most citizens". The Blake name might have acquired a fine reputation in his prior businesses which did not seem to include assaying gold but the Agrell mame regardless of spelling was not even in the Sacramento directories. Kagin points out as an excuse for the misspelling that SCHULTS was misspelled on another pioneer gold coin when a terminal "S" punch was used instead of "Z".

Further review of the matter in Kagin reveals that he lists under his BLAKE & AGNELL subsection as his K-3 variety an 1855 \$50 rectangular planchet, on the obverse of which is impressed a circular die with the screw press (p. 281). The reverse illustration for that piece shows a "BLAKE & AGNELL" legend but the descriptive text of BLAKE & CO. is erroneous. ² This mistake is further compounded by his description of his K-4 variety (p. 282) which is round and he states that both the obverse and reverse are similar to his K-2 variety which is different in shape, legend and design. To add to the confusion in the description of K-3 it is stated that an uncut strip of three \$25 size ingots exists but this presumably is supposed to relate to K-1 and not to K-3. Kagin also describes under the subtitle "Patterns, Die Trials & Experimental Pieces" (p. 323), a group of six Blake & Co. pieces (pp. 334-336). These consist of three unique uniface 1855 pieces struck in base metals using the screw press design die, one 1856 \$20 circular pattern in copper as described and illustrated by Edgar H. Adams in 1912; and two unique undated rectangular white metal bars with much of their legends punched on in curved lines and

² This mistake apparently misled Alan Herbert in his book <u>Coin Clinic</u> (Iola 1995) p. 54 to state that a unique 1855 \$50 BLAKE & CO (spelled Blake and Co) with the screw press design existed.

cancelled with large X marks scratched on the faces. None of these pieces are included in the Kagin index. Even though they do not relate to the misspelling problem directly they must be considered because some of them are associated by die and punch linkage to the \$50 BLAKE & AGNELL rectangular piece that contains the misspelling.

Kagin wrote that John Agrell died in late December, 1855 (p. 282 and also in his dissertation), such an extended expiration also was given in his dissertation, apparently accepting Taxay's factually unsupported comment on the matter (p. 352). The notice of the dissolution of the partnership specifically stated that it was by mutual consent and not by actual or impending death. Breen (p. 652) merely mentions Kagin's assertion of the matter rather than confirming it.

Kagin's dissertation has profuse, detailed endnotes but unfortunately his publisher eliminated them from the book, and used only his "Selected Bibliography". Any deficiencies in Kagin's book should not detract materially from his important research findings.

THE BREEN ENCYCLOPEDIA

Walter Breen's Encyclopedia (1988) had the advantage of using all of the work and writing of prior researchers to which he extensively added his own. He included all of the "BLAKE & AGNELL" pieces with the warning: "if authentic" (p. 651). He specifically agreed that the Edgar H. Adams use of "BLAKE & AGNELL" was a typographical error. He recognized the importance that "BLAKE & AGNELL" coins; bars or ingots were not known until the 1950s and concludes "strange indeed to find it (the misspelling of AGNELL) on the coins, which were unknown until the 1950s!" His

astonishment in realizing the sequence of events in the misspelling of AGNELL first occurring in print in 1912 and the identical misspelling being found on round and rectangular pieces first appearing in the 1950s is indicated by his use of an exclamation point at the end of his comment. Breen omitted from his Encyclopedia any mention or illustration of six unique trial pieces in copper and white metal described on pp. 334-336 of Kagin's 1981 book under the Blake & Co. caption. His stated reason was "The present study makes no attempt to describe bullion storage ingots or patterns known to exist only in base metals. Research here is ongoing, but the most recent discoveries in all these lines including the most controversial specimens are described in detail in Kagin." (p. 630).

A 1999 COIN WORLD INTERVIEW

Beth Deisher as editor of <u>Coin World</u> reported in the September 6, 1999 issue an interview with John J. Ford, Jr. containing the following comments as to Western ingots and bars:

"Ford scoffs that those who question the authenticity of the Western assay bars he and Franklin found and marketed in the 1950s and 1960s. Some even suggest that he and Franklin were involved in an elaborate counterfeiting scheme."

"Playing devil's advocate, Ford questions where such bars could have been made or how they could have been made with the proper balance of copper, silver, iron, manganese and other trace elements in them."

Of his accusers, Ford said,

"These guys are academics. They have no hint of pragmatism. They haven't the slightest idea that to make these things you need molds, you need punches. First thing you need is to know what's in them. How would I have known all of this?"

Accompanying the <u>Coin World</u> article is a picture of one page of a brochure of John J. Ford, Jr. indicates is copyrighted and is dated 1957. An omitted page from that brochure

indicates that there was collector interest in "the letter and numeral punches used for making bars and ingots, bar and ingot moulds."

In <u>The Numismatist</u> for July 1959 there is an advertisement of New Netherlands Coin Co. Inc., at which John J. Ford, Jr. then was working, stating "we have scrutinized pioneer patterns and trials, unofficial coin dies, assay ingot punches *** and even bar and ingot moulds." Below that is an excerpt which stated: "It will pay you to contact us if you have any of the following items or know where to locate them! *** Any ephemera connected with the Numismatic West; from Assayer's letter punches to ***."

One might conclude from such publicity that Gold Rush period letter punches, numeral punches, moulds for bars and ingots, etc. might be available for purchase in the 1950s. Such letter and numeral punches of many sizes and styles were used for marking or forming metal and other products of general use and were not specifically prepared for making bars and ingots. As to information concerning the chemical content of ores and other material there was always substantial data readily available to everyone. The protests against the academics may seem unjustified.

BLAKE RELATED ITEMS IN THE JOSIAH K LILLY-SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION HOLDINGS

After Josiah K. Lilly died his enormous collection of gold coins was inventoried and appraised by Abe Kosoff and Hans M.F. Schulman in September 1967. An Act if Congress was passed providing that the Lilly Estate would receive \$5,500,000 as an estate tax credit if his gold collection were donated to the Smithsonian Institution. The donation was made. There are four Blake related items described, the first two being

principally gold and from Sacramento and the last two being principally silver and from the Idaho Territory.

BLAKE & AGNELL

Ingot, \$20.15. This company had its smelting and assaying plant at 52 J Street in Sacramento.

BLAKE & COMPANY

Pattern in Gold. \$20 1855. Formerly Blake & Agnell. A unique item acquired by Stack's from a Mr. F. Korff of Mesa, Arizona.

BLAKE & COMPANY

Ingot, silver, \$3.04 Ex-Don C. Keefer Collection.

BLAKE & COMPANY

Ingot, silver, \$14.48, No. 326 Ex-Keefer, New Netherlands Coin Co., Gerald Fox.

It can be observed that the misspelled word "Agnell" is used both as to the lettering on the coin and in the description of the firm name. It may also be noted that the word COMPANY is spelled out instead of being abbreviated, but this is an obviously accidental deviation.

The existence of F. Korff of Mesa, Arizona has been extensively researched in records for that area including telephone books, directories, licenses, land records, voting

records, etc. and no such person has been found. This indicates a severe problem. Repeated requests from the Smithsonian Institution for complete copies of the Lilly records have been requested for many years by several people and have not resulted in the records being furnished. Efforts under the Federal Freedom of Information Act after an extensive period of correspondence met with a refusal on the grounds that those records did not belong to the Smithsonian Institution and that after a long period of retention the records were returned by Smithsonian Institution to the Estate of Josiah K. Lilly as its property. Nevertheless copies of the bulk of those records are available from private sources. Messrs. Kosoff and Schulman, both now deceased, also failed to cooperate in making those records available.

Subsequent to the Lilly transfer, a BLAKE & AGNELL strip of three gold \$25 size horizontal stampings was donated to the Smithsonian Institution by Emery May Norweb. There may also be gifts of such material from others.

THE BLAKE & CO CONCENTRIC CIRCLES DIE

There seems to be no logical reason for a BLAKE & CO circular reverse die with a concentric circles design to exist. Such a die was used for the reverse of two 1855 gold \$20 size circular coins with the screw press design die struck on the obverse and a 20 punched in on both faces. No \$20 size circular coin with the misspelled name BLAKE & AGNELL on the reverse is known. Only one BLAKE & AGNELL piece struck with a circular BLAKE & AGNELL die is known, that one being on a \$50 size rectangular gold bar with the 1855 screw press die used for the obverse and the denomination 50 punched in on both faces. Each of the three above described pieces first appeared in the 1950s.

One of the 1855 \$20 BLAKE & CO coins has a jewelry loop soldered on to it, as does a

James King of William gold bar which first appeared in the 1950s. Such a loop de loop may cause dizziness.

BLAKE & CO was in existence only for 5 days during 1855 (December 27, 1855 to December 31, 1855). A normal plan for future coinage if desired at that time would have been to have a new pair of BLAKE & CO dies prepared with an 1856 date and that is exactly what was done. By 1855 the size, design and general appearance of many public and private \$20 Liberty head gold pieces had been in circulation in California and were generally consistent in size and appearance. They were struck by the U.S. Branch Mint in San Francisco, by Moffat & Co., Baldwin & Co., Kellogg & Co., and Wass, Molitor & Co. Thus BLAKE & CO. followed that trend by having dies of similar design prepared and dated 1856. George A.F. Kuner was an available diecutter in nearby San Francisco well skilled in the preparation of coin dies. Expediency of such die preparation would have been greatly impaired if the die work had been ordered from the east coast of the United States. The San Francisco Branch Mint was in operation striking U.S. \$20 and other gold coinage and although it continued to have intermittent minor production problems at the time the urgent need for private gold coinage had passed and was insignificant at the beginning of 1856 when the newly formed Blake & Co. considered such an undertaking. Thus the 1856 dated Liberty head obverse and the eagle reverse dies specially prepared for Blake & Co. were never used for gold coinage and have only been known through trial strikings in base metal. Certainly any coinage with such designs would circulate more readily than one with a newly created screw press design on the obverse and concentric circles on the reverse. The latter coins would have been unlike the bulk of other style \$20 gold pieces in circulation.

It should be recognized that the reverse of the two \$20 BLAKE & CO circular pieces were not struck with an 1856 dated obverse die but with the same 1855 dated screw press obverse die as previously used on its 1855 \$50 BLAKE & AGNELL rectangular gold bar. No 1855 dated \$20 or \$20 size BLAKE & AGNELL gold piece is known whether on a circular planchet or otherwise.

There was therefore no reason for the concentric circles reverse die for the \$20 BLAKE & CO pieces to be made and used in 1856 because more practical and more attractive 1856 dies were prepared for BLAKE & CO.

Since the use of circular dies for the 1855 BLAKE & AGNELL piece and the die for the two BLAKE & CO pieces were not known until the 1950s all of their dies are put in jeopardy. Thus all of the products made from such dies would have the same genes. The basis for this thinking has been reached separately from any reliance upon the misspelling of the firm name of Blake & Agrell, yet both lines of reasoning interlock and point to the same conclusion.

The items first appearing in the 1950s may be based upon a cleverly contrived scenario.

As Hamlet said, "Ay, there's the rub".

UNPUBLISHED OPINIONS ON BLAKE & AGNELL PIECES

The New Netherlands Coin Co., Inc., prepared a first draft (no other draft known) of a report entitled Blake & Agnell Pioneer Coiners and Assayers of Sacramento, 1854
1862, and apparently sent it in 1953 to Emery May Norweb, a collector living in Cleveland, Ohio, in connection with the sale by or through New Netherlands to her of a Blake & Agnell gold strip or bar dated 1855 with three separate identical stampings in a

horizontal row for \$25 size gold bars as discussed in detail on page 3 of section I of that report. The original of that report was sent to Eric P. Newman Numismatic Education Society by Henry Norweb (husband of Emery May Norweb) on November 27, 1968 in connection with a Norweb request for an opinion on the authenticity of the above mentioned gold strip because of the research undertaken by that Society in connection with the Garland vs. Ryan arbitration involving a proof-like 1853 \$20 U.S.A.O.G. gold piece. The strip itself was also sent to that Society for study.

The New Netherlands report consists of 5 typewritten pages and is divided into two sections: (I) Historical Background and (II) the Known Issues of Blake & Agnell and Blake & Co. There are 10 pieces described in section II and one based upon rumor.

Some unusual features of that report are as follows:

- (A) The name Agnell is mentioned six times as part of the lettering on numismatic items and eight additional times in historical language. The name Agrell is never used. There is no indication of knowledge that the name Agnell was a misspelling of the name Agrell.
- (B) The first name of the person referred to as Agnell is indicated as unknown although the name John Agrell was published on December 29, 1855 etc. in the *Sacramento Union* newspaper and otherwise.
- (C) The middle initial of Gorham P. Blake is stated as newspaper content but does not seem to appear in any business announcement in a newspaper at the time.
- (D) The \$20.15 Blake & Agnell rectangular ingot dated 1854 as previously mentioned herein is included as Item 1.
- (E) The death of "Agnell" was said to have occurred on or about December 29, 1855 and reference was given to the publication of Edgar H. Adams (1911-1913) as the source. A dissolution of the co-partnership by "mutual consent" was announced on December 29, 1855 as of December 27, 1855 in the Sacramento Union newspaper. Perhaps confusion came about from the publisher's inserted duration or interval signal which added (d 28-lw)" to the end of the dissolution announcement. No such date of death is indicated in the published study of Edgar H. Adams on pioneer gold (1911-1913).
- (F) There is no mention of any G BLAKE ASSAYER gold bar dated 1854. This bar, as heretofore described, first appeared in a European auction in 1962 so New Netherlands might not have been familiar with it in 1953.
- (G) The number of equidistantly spaced concentric circles on the pieces described as Nos. 5, 6, and 7 are respectively 18, 21, and 28, showing that the diemaker would

- have had available in California a finely adjustable metal lathe during the 1855 period even though an "engine turning" machine was definitely not available.
- (H) As to a Blake & Agnell unique \$25 rectangular ingot dated 1855 (Item 3) it is stated, "It is considered likely that other examples of this variety will turn up." This forecast is irresponsible and has a tendency to create suspicion.

(I) No discovery or source information or provenance of any item is furnished in spite of showing an extensive familiarity with pioneer gold history.

- (J) It was suggested that the BLAKE & AGNELL strip of three separate horizontal stampings was rejected for being underweight and therefore was kept as a souvenir by the assayers.
- (K) The BLAKE & CO assay ingot with the name in an arc is not further described because it was not examined, but it seems to have the characteristics of genuine BLAKE & CO assay ingots subsequently salvaged from SS Central America.

The opinion of Eric P. Newman Numismatic Education Society as to the Blake and Agnell gold strip dated 1855 with three identical separate horizontal stampings was sent to the Norwebs on June 18, 1969 and contained the following major observations:

- (AA) That the souvenir status of the strip because it was slightly underweight to be cut into three \$25 size pieces was unjustified because it could easily be remelted or two pieces of full weight could easily have been cut from it and the remaining underweight portion remelted. An assayer keeping a souvenir of that value, easily reproducible, and with a misspelled name on it seems to be pure hype.
- (BB) No information as to the discovery, source or provenance of the strip was furnished in the detailed report or otherwise.
- (CC) It was pointed out that in the July 1959 advertisement of New Netherlands Coin Co., Inc., in <u>The Numismatist</u> that the advertisers had the "good fortune to devise a system of unearthing numerous unique pieces not previously known". Forecasting such a future not only was unreliable insight but forecasting the finding of unique pieces seems even worse.
- (DD) The same advertisement stated that "we have handled the most fabulous items imaginable". The word "fabulous" may be an advertising puff, but fabulous fundamentally means unreal.
- (EE) It was pointed out that Paul Franklin and John J. Ford, Jr. for many years had a business relationship, were close friends, and lived in communities close to each other in Long Island, NY.
- (FF) It was pointed out that Paul Franklin was the source of the previously unknown Parsons bar from Colorado and the source of the previously unknown Blake & Co. gold pieces struck with circular dies.
- (GG) It was pointed out that Paul Franklin testified at the Garland vs. Ryan arbitration hearings that he was a skilled machinist and gave full technical details of his knowledge of electrotyping.
- (HH) It was pointed out that Paul Franklin refused to testify at the Garland vs. Ryan arbitration hearings as to the source of the 1853 \$20 U.S.A.O.G. gold coins, one of which was the coin under consideration at those hearings.

(II) It was pointed out that John J. Ford, Jr. had told Eric P. Newman that Paul Franklin was the finest metallurgist that Ford had ever known.

There may be other unpublished opinions which will come to light.

S.S. CENTRAL AMERICA

Publicity about the immense amount of assay ingots, bars and coins salvaged from the S.S. Central America has not mentioned any item with the name BLAKE & AGNELL or BLAKE & AGRELL or AGNELL or AGRELL. The Sotheby Auction of 1999-2000 included only about 8 % of the find and that portion has 15 assay ingots of BLAKE & CO. The Sotheby catalog (pp. 84-87) mentions the name John Agrell in the historical section. As to the remaining 92% of the treasure another 19 more BLAKE & CO. assay ingots were found. There were no coins found with the name BLAKE on them. All assay ingots found contain no other name but BLAKE & CO. No salvaged pieces show any identical letter or numeral punches identical to any of the coins or bars containing the name BLAKE which were publicized before the Central America recovery. There is no challenge whatever as to the authenticity of the Central America pieces. There was no known opportunity to salt the wreck. The Yeoman-Bressett Red Book has included the listing of S.S. Central America pieces since 1994.

Naturally there must have been other genuine BLAKE & CO assay ingots which "missed the boat".

AN EARLY NUMISMATIC COPYING ERROR

Assuming that the misspelling of BLAKE & AGRELL as BLAKE & AGNELL on coins, bars and ingots discovered in the 1950s was copied from the typographical error in the 1912 Adam's publication there is a comparable American numismatic situation which occurred more than a century earlier.

The creation of the U.S. Dollar dated 1804 during the 1833-1834 period has a similar timing error relationship. Due to misinterpretation of the U.S. Mint records contemporaneously made for the year 1804 it was thought in the 1833-34 period that dollars dated 1804 had been minted in 1804. Thus dies for dollars dated 1804 were cut during the 1833-34 period and fantasy dollars were struck from them at the U.S. Mint. Subsequent evidence showed that the U.S. records covering 1804 were an accounting of the transfer of money within departments of the U.S. Mint and included only Spanish-American 8 reales coins (Spanish dollars) and /or U.S. dollars struck from dies dated 1803 or earlier. Thus the creation of dollars dated 1804 was exposed in 1962, etc. as having been influenced during the 1833-1834 period by a misinterpretation of a routine but somewhat ambiguous official report for 1804 which was misleading but not actually erroneous. (See Eric P. Newman and Kenneth E. Bressett, The Fantastic 1804 Dollar, 1962; Eric P. Newman, "A Restated Opinion on the Origin of the 1804 Dollar and the 1804 Eagle Proofs", Coinage of the Americas Conference 1993, American Numismatic Society, 1994).

As to both the Agnell spelling error and the misinterpretation of an 1804 records the copying from an earlier source to reach a subsequent inaccurate conclusion in each

situation seems to clarify and suggest the later date in each situation as the date of the creation of each of the fantasy pieces.

GENUINE FAKES OF BLAKE & CO.

The Chrysler Corporation in 1969 needed a gimmick to promote the introduction of its 1970 Golden Duster Valiant automobile. It undertook to copy for that purpose an 1855 \$20 Blake & Co. circular California pioneer gold piece which was the same size as the United States \$20 gold coinage. Chrysler had many, many thousands of copies reproduced in a brassy color using a mixture of non-precious metals. These were given away and avidly enjoyed by the public. (See the listing in Larry Spanbauer, Colonial Copies, Private Mint Replicas, Modern Counterfeits of United States Coins, Oshkosh 1975, p.4)

Thereafter inquiries concerning their value as rarities were enormous and the tales created by members of the public to support their genuineness and gold comtent defy the imagination. Numismatic columnists and others continually have had to disappoint the many inquirers over the years since then. In 1976 there was even litigation in Michigan over the ownership of one and the case was dropped when a jeweler determined that the coin had no gold content.

Some numismatists enjoyed the situation immensely because they felt hat a fake of a fake was truly comical.

IDAHO TERRITORY BARS

There are in existence at least five numbered bars principally of silver content punched with the words BLAKE & CO/ASSAYERS/OWYHEE, I.T. as well as the fineness and value. The I.T. is an abbreviation of Idaho Territory. Precious metals were discovered in the Owyhee area in 1863. The principal owner of the Blake & Co Idaho Territory business was apparently Francis W. Blake (Frank Blake) and a possible participant, Charles T. Blake, both relatives of Gorham Blake. These pieces have not been included in this study because they are (1) principally silver and not gold bars; (2) not issued until after 1863 and not during the Gold Rush period; (3) not geographically connected to California; and (4) from a different Blake & Co. firm from the prior Sacramento partnership of the same name with which Gorham Blake was a named participant. Several of the Idaho Territory pieces have been known numismatically since at least 1936 and 1937.

CONCLUSION, SCOPE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The chances of Edgar H. Adams in 1912 having his publication contain a spelling error identical to a spelling error allegedly made in 1854 or 1855 on coins, bars, or ingots which Adams had never seen or heard of is virtually nil. A chronological copying order of an error of this type seems to become a logical conclusion since the 1912 spelling error came first and then copying that error inadvertently in the 1950s could be a natural and logical happening. From the writings of researchers it appears that the misspelling was first exposed during research undertaken shortly before 1979. Copying mistakes often

constitute a solid proof of plagiarism or other improprieties as well as unchecked reliance upon previously published information.

If there is one BLAKE & AGNELL piece which is a forgery the spreading of a virus is involved. All of the pieces connected to such a forgery by die linkage, interlocked letter or number punches, incorrect spelling of AGRELL's name or other associating factors would be forgeries. This would include some pieces with the BLAKE & CO name. Any person creating such imaginative forgeries would not likely have limited such production to Blake related pieces, much to that person's discredit.

The scope of the data assembled for this research project and covered by it is limited to items which include the name BLAKE plus some other issues or issuers, associated or related to BLAKE matters. There have been omitted many pioneer gold observations which have a more distant association or a need for an independent review.

If there are any statements in the foregoing presentation which are inaccurate or ambiguous, or can be supplemented, clarified or improved upon, the writer welcomes suggestions. If the subject should be enlarged to include other pieces of pioneer gold the material for such items can be assembled individually or as a team effort. The subject matter is intriguing.

It is difficult to show that an existing item or items did not exist at the time they would have had to exist in order to be genuine. The proof of a negative is always a challenge. It is hoped that such a challenge has been reasonably presented.

Thanks are due to many who have over a long period of time shared their information with the writer and it is hoped that they and others will continue to do so.

Those who for whatever reason have preferred to hold back information or opinions in the past are welcome to furnish them at any time.

Would anyone like to purchase on an "as is" basis any gold coin, ingot or bar with the name BLAKE & AGNELL upon it?

September 2000

GOLD PIECES

INVOLVING

GORHAM BLAKE

AT

SACRAMENTO

By Eric P. Newman Numismatic Education Society

(No disclosure, discussion, release or publication of any part hereof is permitted without prior written permission of the above society)

IMPORTANCE OF THE BLAKE & AGNELL MISSPELLING

In a July 2000 Internet communication Robert Leonard included comments on the misspelling of the pioneer gold assaying partnership of Blake and Agrell as "Blake & Agnell". This error was previously pointed out in Donald H. Kagin's Private Gold Coins of the United States (1981), p. 151 and in his 1979 doctoral dissertation, p. 212. Walter Breen's Complete Encyclopedia (1988), p. 651, also includes a discussion of the mistake. The spelling error was not mentioned in the catalogs of Don Taxay, Wayte Raymond or Yeoman-Bressett, each of which included pieces with the "BLAKE & AGNELL" misspelling.

An analysis of available facts and previous written comments seems desirable since Leonard specifically challenges the authenticity of an 1855 \$23.30 "BLAKE & AGNELL" gold bar.

During the 1996-1999 period Theodore V. Buttery undertook presentations challenging the authenticity of an unspecified group of pioneer gold pieces appearing after 1950 and Michael Hodder's presentations during the 1998-2000 period asserted a contrary position. Neither mentioned the misspelling of "BLAKE & AGNELL" on pioneer gold pieces although each includes references to the Blake & Agnell name.

The spelling error "Blake & Agnell" in printed text form first appeared in 1912 on page 108 of the five part studies of U.S. pioneer gold pieces written by Edgar H. Adams for the <u>American Journal of Numismatics</u> which studies have been reprinted. There was only one use of the name Agnell by him and no mention of the name Agrell. Edgar H. Adams in his publication did include the 1856 \$20 circular trial coinage in copper and

brass for Blake & Co. using the name in the coronet on the obverse. He was unaware of any piece bearing the legend BLAKE & AGNELL, BLAKE & AGRELL, or any other piece bearing the name of AGNELL or AGRELL; otherwise he would have included it in his meticulous undertaking. The detail in the historical part of his text indicated his familiarity with an extensive number of informational sources covering western assayers, coiners, mining, etc. beginning prior to 1848 and running through the Gold Rush period. He obviously knew of the partnership of Blake & Agrell (composed of Gorham Blake and John Agrell) which existed for only 45 days from November 12, 1855 to its dissolution on December 27, 1855 according to several newspaper announcements. After Blake & Agrell dissolved by mutual consent, a new partner, W.R. Waters was substituted by Blake for Agrell to create the firm of Blake & Co. Other than on the coins and bars under review all the known 19th century sources uniformly spell the Agrell name correctly. The misspelling in 1912 was apparently made by the typesetter mistaking "r" for "n" which could easily have taken place in transcription due to its somewhat similar written appearance whether in long hand or typewritten. Proof reading just did not catch the error for Adams.

A \$20.15 rectangular gold bar dated 1854 and with its four side surfaces stamped with BLAKE & AGNELL in raised lettering was reported about 1953. The name AGRELL was misspelled. The *Sacramento Union* newspaper announcement dated November 12, 1855 that BLAKE AND AGRELL "are now prepared and well qualified to execute business" is over 11 months after the use of the misspelled name on an 1854 dated bar. The authenticity of such a bar therefore creates a problem due to an 1854 date

of origin of the firm contradicting the date of November 12, 1855 announced for commencement of business as well as a misspelled firm name. Donald H. Kagin recognized the inconsistency by writing, "What is a mystery, however, is the existence of an 1854 BLAKE & AGNELL Gold Ingot" (Dissertation, 1979, p. 221, endnotes 60 and 65).

G. BLAKE, ASSAYER, 1854

In Kagin's 1981 book (p. 171) it is stated that Gorham Blake opened an assay office in 1854 in Sacramento, California where he issued ingots bearing the name "G. Blake Assayer". However, no such ingots or coins containing Blake's first name or initial are described, illustrated or otherwise mentioned in the book. There is no support given for the 1854 date assertion. Pieces dated 1855 and thereafter bearing the BLAKE & AGNELL and the BLAKE & CO names were included. With one exception, there is no written material to our knowledge either before or after Kagin's 1981 book that describes, mentions, or illustrates any coin, bar, ingot, or other tangible item with Blake's first name or initial in the legend.

That exception is the listing and illustration of a gold piece in the catalog of Bank Leu and Adolph Hess AG for an auction sale in Lucerne, Switzerland held October 17-18 1962, Lot # 1007, where the following description was given:

"California Gold. GORHAM BLAKE, ASSAYER Sacramento. \$ 33.68, Ingot 1854

G. BLAKE/ASSAYER/SAC. CAL. Rv. 33.68 (inkus) DOLLS. / 900 (inkus) THOUS.

/1854, in Linienviereck, 57.3 g. Unique, Extremely fine. This is the first example of

Gorham Blake's name alone on an ingot and it is one of the heaviest recorded. This ingot

has been in the possession of one family for at least 50 years."

The translation of the German word inkus means incuse and the word

Linienviereck means rectangular.

How this unique piece is one of the heaviest recorded pieces when no other recorded pieces were known to exist is difficult to understand. If the comment related to other issuers then octagonal \$50 ingots coined by Humbert and the US Assay Office are routinely heavier as Kohler bars also are.

The only other information located as to this G. BLAKE ASSAYER item came from Peter D. Mitchell of A.H. Baldwin & Sons Ltd. of London in 1974. He wrote that this G BLAKE ASSAYER piece was obtained by Mr. Crowther of Spinks and Brian Grover (both London, England coin dealers) "from an impeccable source in the City (Godfather of one of the Queen's children and all that)." Crowther was said to have placed it in the Leu sale and that then John Ford had it withdrawn as a forgery, the reason for which Grover told Mitchell was that Ford pronounced the family's letter giving details of the piece's history as false. Grover then sent the G. BLAKE ASSAYER piece to Lester Merkin, a New York City coin dealer, and it was stolen from Merkin. The piece was later recovered by the police, held for evidence, and eventually returned by Merkin to Grover in England. Grover still had possession of the piece in 1974 and promised Mitchell that he (Grover) would look for the letter from the family about the piece and send Mitchell a copy. The name of the family was never disclosed to Mitchell. The copy of the letter never appeared.

A remarkable coincidence occurred at the above-mentioned 1962 Bank

Leu auction. The only other U.S. pioneer gold piece in the auction other than the G.

BLAKE ASSAYER piece dated 1854 was an 1853 US Assay Office \$20 gold piece with

its condition described as "Fleur du Coin" or proof (Lot # 1008). This piece was one of the same variety and in the same proof-like condition (generally known as a "Franklin hoard" piece) as one which was the subject of a PNG (Professional Numismatic Guild). The arbitration award in 1968 in which it was determined unanimously that the coin was not a proof and its sale as a proof was a misstatement on the invoice justifying the return of the purchase price to the buyer by the seller. All of the 1853 \$20 U.S.A.O.G. gold pieces of the same variety and proof-like condition have been stated to be counterfeit (fake) by Richard S. Montgomery (Rick Montgomery) on page 289 of the portion written by him in the recent book, The Official Guide to Coin Grading and Counterfeit Detection (New York City, 1997). Montgomery is referred to in that book as president of PCGS (Professional Coin Grading Service) and "considered by many to be the number one counterfeit coin detection expert in the world." The published ANACS (American Numismatic Association Certification Service) opinion (The Numismatist, Feb. 1994, p. 290) has taken the same position. (See also Coin World, July 5, 1999, p. 72)

It can be observed that the close association of the G BLAKE ASSAYER ingot dated 1854 and the 1853 USAOG \$20 piece in proof-like condition side by side in the same Swiss auction catalog, being the only pieces of U.S. pioneer gold offered there, might well have had some prior mutual relationship or source. Thus one piece was withdrawn from that auction as a fake and the other piece was not sold for some reason. That other piece was from the same dies and in identical condition as a coin later declared to be a fake by reliable authenticators.

¹ Two arbitrators (one appointed by Garland and one by mutual consent of the arbitrators for each party to the dispute) believed the 1853 \$20 USAOG piece was a forgery, but the third arbitrator (appointed by Ryan) did not agree. The desire to have a unanimous decision rather than a 2-1 decision was selected and thus the difference of opinion among arbitrators in the final opinion was avoided.

On March 1-2, 1962, the same year as the Swiss auction above mentioned, both

Crowther and Grover were also involved in the placement and "sale" of a false St.

Patrick's farthing struck in gold as Lof#365 in an auction by Wallis & Wallis at Lewes;

Sussex, England at which the farthing was alleged to have brought £500, the highest

priced coin in the history of that auctioneer. It was said to have been bought by Spinks for

whom Crowther worked. A request to see the underbidder's name and bid was refused

by the auctioneer. That request was made to try to determine whether a wash sale in a

rural English auction had occurred to create a false provenance and an artificial price.

Spinks sold the coin to Emery May Norweb. After her death it was withdrawn from the

Bowers & Merena Auction of her collection held March 24-25, 1988, (Lot 2386) and

donated to the American Numismatic Society for study.

The year 1962 was a busy one for the sale of forged American related pieces in European auctions. The fact that they were not auctioned in the United States is strange. Each piece was a major American rarity, if genuine. The G. BLAKE ASSAYER piece and the St. Patrick farthing in gold were previously unknown by the public. None of the pieces had a named provenance or consignor. Two were side by side in the same auction. The same numismatic professionals were involved in the submission of the pieces in two separate and unrelated auction sales about 6 months apart. Each piece was stated to be a forgery or fake at the time of the sale or thereafter, at least one and perhaps two being withdrawn from the original auction sale as false; the details of the sale, if any, of another being refused at the time of the original auction but being withdrawn from a 1988 auction sale; and the third being an identical companion to a piece subsequently declared to be a forgery.

The above factors do not seem to allow a reasonable person to reject the circumstances of guilt by association as to background or source of these pieces, whether a person chooses preponderance of evidence or beyond a reasonable doubt as a basis for reconfirming their lack of authenticity and their probable origin from a common source of forged pieces.

To add to the foregoing there is no evidence other than the G BLAKE ASSAYER ingot dated 1854 that Blake was an assayer in Sacramento in the year 1854 and up to November 12, 1855. He had arrived in California in 1852 and had been active in several gold related ventures, including gold dust buying, gold mine superintendence, and gold mine ownership. The *Sacramento Union* newspaper on November 12, 1855 carried an announcement that the Blake and Agrell partnership " are now prepared and well qualified to execute business" (melting, refining and assaying) and welcomed customers. The word "now" indicates a commencement date rather than a continuance of a prior business. They hired as an assayer, David Lundhom, who was working as First Assayer of Kellogg & Co. in San Francisco until it ceased business in October, 1855.

RAYMOND CATALOGS

In <u>The Standard Catalogue of U.S. Coins</u> by Wayte Raymond there was no mention of either "Blake & Co." or "Blake & Agnell" pieces until the 17th edition copyrighted in 1954 and dated 1954-55. In its two page introduction to "Private Gold Issues" it is stated that "There are also a great number of patterns and so-called patterns (some of which are undoubtedly modern) of these issues, some bearing the names of companies about which no contemporary references can be found, others being varieties

of issues known to be authentic". There are included and illustrated under "Blake & Co, Sacramento 1855, 56" illustrations of two circular pieces, as follows:

- (I) An 1855 \$20 size obverse with a coin screw press design and a lathe turned design with BLAKE & CO ASSAYERS on the reverse. The numerals 20 are punched in on each face. Its weight is 507.7 grains. It is further described as "2 known, one of these is misstruck and looped."
- (II) An obverse dated 1856 with a female head facing left and a coronet reading BLAKE & CO. On the reverse is SACRAMENTO CALIFORNIA TWENTY D.

The associate editor was John J. Ford, Jr. with research by Walter Breen.

The above mentioned "undoubtedly modern" pieces refers to pieces produced with equipment held by, available to or obtained from Stephen K. Nagy, a Philadelphia numismatic and antiquarian dealer who had close ties through relatives to a high official at the U.S. Mint in Philadelphia (William Idler).

In the 18th and last edition of Raymond's catalogs, copyrighted 1957, the two pieces under BLAKE & CO remain the same except the comment about the 1855 dated piece is changed to "The first specimen was unearthed by John J. Ford Jr. in 1953, the second in 1954." John J. Ford. Jr. 's status as to the 18th edition of the book was revised to "Editor Consultation and Supervision" while Breen was described as "Compilation and Basic Research". The word "unearthed" can be interpreted either as "archeologically located" or as "discovered" but it is not clear which was intended as no further detail was there stated.

In American Coin Treasures and Hoards (1997) by Q. David Bowers on p. 271 and in other oral and written statements it is said that John J. Ford, Jr. explained that "Franklin found the material and I researched and sold it." Ford continued to elaborate that "Franklin was not to tell me where he obtained his material***." This seems to leave credit for the discovery of the "unearthed" items in a somewhat contradictory status.

It can also be observed that the John J. Ford, Jr. flyer copyrighted in 1957 and soliciting correspondence and rubbings of western American numismatic related items were to be sent to his home but does not mention Franklin's name or address. Similarly the July 1959 advertisement in The Numismatist by New Netherlands Coin Co. Inc. (the employer of John J. Ford, Jr.) suggests to readers who have Western Numismatic Americana that "it will pay you to deal direct" and gives only the New York City address of New Netherlands for "offers, appraisals, correspondence, transactions". This and other advertising do not mention Franklin's name. No Franklin flyer or advertising is known.

The foregoing seems to cast doubt on the statement that Franklin "found" the material and turned it over to Ford for sale.

Both of the advertisements above mentioned prominently feature an illustration of both faces of the 1855 \$ 25 rectangular gold bar with the BLAKE & AGNELL misspelling. This type of piece will be commented upon subsequently.

THE RED BOOK

In the Yeoman-Bressett 9th edition of the "Red Book" for the year 1956 the first "BLAKE & AGNELL" bar or ingot is included (p. 212) and consists of a piece dated

1855 with a \$23.30 value struck into it by punch. This listing remained unchanged until the 13th edition for the year 1960 when three new pieces and some historical data were added. The new pieces were (a) an 1855 rectangular bar or ingot with the misspelled BLAKE & AGNELL name and with the denomination \$25.00 die struck on the obverse; (b) an 1855 dated \$20 size circular piece having a screw press on the obverse and with concentric circles and BLAKE & CO. upon the reverse and with 20 as a denomination punched in on both obverse and reverse; and (c) a mention of the 1856 \$20 circular trial piece in non-precious metal with BLAKE & CO on the coronet of the obverse. This situation remained virtually unchanged until the \$19^{th}\$ edition for the year 1966 when all BLAKE & AGNELL as well as BLAKE & CO. pieces were entirely eliminated. Those eliminated pieces have never been reinstated in the Yeoman-Bressett catalog.

In 1994 and thereafter the Yeoman-Bressett catalog has illustrated and described examples of BLAKE & CO and other assay bars salvaged from the wreck of S.S. Central America.

THE TAXAY BOOK

During his five years of preparation of <u>The Comprehensive Catalog and Encyclopedia of United States Coins</u> (Omaha 1970) Don Taxay was in continual contact with U. S. pioneer gold research and researchers. He illustrated as item 99 on plate 105 of his book an 1855 \$25 rectangular "BLAKE & AGNELL" bar but in the text description (p. 358) misdates it as 1856. He was either unaware of or rejected the inclusion of an 1855 \$50 "BLAKE & AGNELL" rectangular gold bar struck with circular dies or he would have described and illustrated it as he did the 1855 \$20 circular "BLAKE & CO."

piece using an identical obverse die. He was also unaware of the correct spelling of the partnership name of Blake & Agrell as he uses the name "Agnell" three times (p. 352) showing that he believed it was the correct spelling of the name. His unawareness of or rejection of the 1855 "Blake & Agnell" \$50 piece is unusual in that it had the same provenance (Ford, Bank of California) as the 1855 \$25 rectangular "BLAKE & AGNELL" bar and one of the 1855 \$20 circular BLAKE & CO. pieces. (See also Breen, p. 651, for ownership confirmation).

Taxay also stated that there were bars made in 1854 under the name G BLAKE ASSAYER (p. 352), but did not describe or illustrate any. He apparently was aware of the 1962 events as to such a bar.

Taxay also wrote that he knew of a number of 1856 dated "Blake & Co." assay bars (p. 352) but he did not give any source of his information or describe or illustrate any of them, possibly because these items were not coins and therefore not within the scope of his book. Whether they were of the type found in the salvage from S.S. Central America in the 1980s and 1990s or otherwise does not seem determinable from his work.

THE KAGIN BOOK

Kagin in his <u>Private Gold Coins</u> publication of 1981 (p. 171), and in his 1979 doctoral dissertation (p. 212) appears to be the first to mention the misspelling of the name Agrell as "Agnell". Kagin indicates the mistake of one letter on the dies might not have been practical to correct, "especially when they were a large company known by most citizens in Sacramento." He shows two dies with the "BLAKE & AGNELL" name misspelled, one being the round die and the other being the rectangular die. No pieces

have the name spelled correctly or in any other variation of the misspelling. Kagin's suggestion seems unsupported and unjustified because the partnership was only in business for 45 days altogether, which is too short a time to be "known by most citizens".

The Blake name might have acquired a fine reputation in his prior businesses which did not seem to include assaying gold but the Agrell name regardless of spelling was not even in the Sacramento directories. Kagin points out as an excuse for the misspelling that SCHULTS was misspelled on another pioneer gold coin when a terminal "S" punch was used instead of "Z".

Further review of the matter in Kagin reveals that he lists under his BLAKE & AGNELL subsection as his K-3 variety an 1855 \$50 rectangular planchet, on the obverse of which is impressed a circular die with the screw press (p. 281). The reverse illustration for that piece shows a "BLAKE & AGNELL" legend but the descriptive text of BLAKE & CO. is erroneous. ² This mistake is further compounded by his description of his K-4 variety (p. 282) which is round and he states that both the obverse and reverse are similar to his K-2 variety which is different in shape, legend and design. To add to the confusion in the description of K-3 it is stated that an uncut strip of three \$25 size ingots exists but this presumably is supposed to relate to K-1 and not to K-3. Kagin also describes under the subtitle "Patterns, Die Trials & Experimental Pieces" (p. 323), a group of six Blake & Co. pieces (pp. 334-336). These consist of three unique uniface 1855 pieces struck in base metals using the screw press design die, one 1856 \$20 circular pattern in copper as described and illustrated by Edgar H. Adams in 1912; and two unique undated rectangular white metal bars with much of their legends punched on in curved lines and

² This mistake apparently misled Alan Herbert in his book <u>Coin Clinic</u> (Iola 1995) p. 54 to state that a unique 1855 \$50 BLAKE & CO (spelled Blake and Co) with the screw press design existed.

cancelled with large X marks scratched on the faces. None of these pieces are included in the Kagin index. Even though they do not relate to the misspelling problem directly they must be considered because some of them are associated by die and punch linkage to the \$50 BLAKE & AGNELL rectangular piece that contains the misspelling.

Kagin wrote that John Agrell died in late December, 1855 (p. 282 and also in his dissertation), such an extended expiration also was given in his dissertation, apparently accepting Taxay's factually unsupported comment on the matter (p. 352). The notice of the dissolution of the partnership specifically stated that it was by mutual consent and not by actual or impending death. Breen (p. 652) merely mentions Kagin's assertion of the matter rather than confirming it.

Kagin's dissertation has profuse, detailed endnotes but unfortunately his publisher eliminated them from the book, and used only his "Selected Bibliography". Any deficiencies in Kagin's book should not detract materially from his important research findings.

THE BREEN ENCYCLOPEDIA

Walter Breen's Encyclopedia (1988) had the advantage of using all of the work and writing of prior researchers to which he extensively added his own. He included all of the "BLAKE & AGNELL" pieces with the warning: "if authentic" (p. 651). He specifically agreed that the Edgar H. Adams use of "BLAKE & AGNELL" was a typographical error. He recognized the importance that "BLAKE & AGNELL" coins; bars or ingots were not known until the 1950s and concludes "strange indeed to find it (the misspelling of AGNELL) on the coins, which were unknown until the 1950s!" His

astonishment in realizing the sequence of events in the misspelling of AGNELL first occurring in print in 1912 and the identical misspelling being found on round and rectangular pieces first appearing in the 1950s is indicated by his use of an exclamation point at the end of his comment. Breen omitted from his Encyclopedia any mention or illustration of six unique trial pieces in copper and white metal described on pp. 334-336 of Kagin's 1981 book under the Blake & Co. caption. His stated reason was "The present study makes no attempt to describe bullion storage ingots or patterns known to exist only in base metals. Research here is ongoing, but the most recent discoveries in all these lines including the most controversial specimens are described in detail in Kagin." (p. 630).

A 1999 COIN WORLD INTERVIEW

Beth Deisher as editor of <u>Coin World</u> reported in the September 6, 1999 issue an interview with John J. Ford, Jr. containing the following comments as to Western ingots and bars:

"Ford scoffs that those who question the authenticity of the Western assay bars he and Franklin found and marketed in the 1950s and 1960s. Some even suggest that he and Franklin were involved in an elaborate counterfeiting scheme."

"Playing devil's advocate, Ford questions where such bars could have been made or how they could have been made with the proper balance of copper, silver, iron, manganese and other trace elements in them."

Of his accusers, Ford said,

"These guys are academics. They have no hint of pragmatism. They haven't the slightest idea that to make these things you need molds, you need punches. First thing you need is to know what's in them. How would I have known all of this?"

Accompanying the Coin World article is a picture of one page of a brochure of John J. Ford, Jr. indicates is copyrighted and is dated 1957. An omitted page from that brochure

indicates that there was collector interest in "the letter and numeral punches used for making bars and ingots, bar and ingot moulds."

In The Numismatist for July 1959 there is an advertisement of New Netherlands....

Coin Co. Inc., at which John J. Ford, Jr. then was working, stating "we have scrutinized pioneer patterns and trials, unofficial coin dies, assay ingot punches *** and even bar and ingot moulds." Below that is an excerpt which stated: "It will pay you to contact us if you have any of the following items or know where to locate them! *** Any ephemera connected with the Numismatic West; from Assayer's letter punches to ***."

One might conclude from such publicity that Gold Rush period letter punches, numeral punches, moulds for bars and ingots, etc. might be available for purchase in the 1950s. Such letter and numeral punches of many sizes and styles were used for marking or forming metal and other products of general use and were not specifically prepared for making bars and ingots. As to information concerning the chemical content of ores and other material there was always substantial data readily available to everyone. The protests against the academics may seem unjustified.

BLAKE RELATED ITEMS IN THE JOSIAH K LILLY-SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION HOLDINGS

After Josiah K. Lilly died his enormous collection of gold coins was inventoried and appraised by Abe Kosoff and Hans M.F. Schulman in September 1967. An Act if Congress was passed providing that the Lilly Estate would receive \$5,500,000 as an estate tax credit if his gold collection were donated to the Smithsonian Institution. The donation was made. There are four Blake related items described, the first two being

It should be recognized that the reverse of the two \$20 BLAKE & CO circular pieces were not struck with an 1856 dated obverse die but with the same 1855 dated screw press obverse die as previously used on its 1855 \$50 BLAKE & AGNELL rectangular gold bar. No 1855 dated \$20 or \$20 size BLAKE & AGNELL gold piece is known whether on a circular planchet or otherwise.

There was therefore no reason for the concentric circles reverse die for the \$20 BLAKE & CO pieces to be made and used in 1856 because more practical and more attractive 1856 dies were prepared for BLAKE & CO.

Since the use of circular dies for the 1855 BLAKE & AGNELL piece and the die for the two BLAKE & CO pieces were not known until the 1950s all of their dies are put in jeopardy. Thus all of the products made from such dies would have the same genes. The basis for this thinking has been reached separately from any reliance upon the misspelling of the firm name of Blake & Agrell, yet both lines of reasoning interlock and point to the same conclusion.

The items first appearing in the 1950s may be based upon a cleverly contrived scenario.

As Hamlet said, "Ay, there's the rub".

UNPUBLISHED OPINIONS ON BLAKE & AGNELL PIECES

The New Netherlands Coin Co., Inc., prepared a first draft (no other draft known) of a report entitled Blake & Agnell Pioneer Coiners and Assayers of Sacramento, 1854-1862, and apparently sent it in 1953 to Emery May Norweb, a collector living in Cleveland, Ohio, in connection with the sale by or through New Netherlands to her of a Blake & Agnell gold strip or bar dated 1855 with three separate identical stampings in a

horizontal row for \$25 size gold bars as discussed in detail on page 3 of section I of that report. The original of that report was sent to Eric P. Newman Numismatic Education Society by Henry Norweb (husband of Emery May Norweb) on November 27, 1968 in connection with a Norweb request for an opinion on the authenticity of the above mentioned gold strip because of the research undertaken by that Society in connection with the Garland vs. Ryan arbitration involving a proof-like 1853 \$20 U.S.A.O.G. gold piece. The strip itself was also sent to that Society for study.

The New Netherlands report consists of 5 typewritten pages and is divided into two sections: (I) Historical Background and (II) the Known Issues of Blake & Agnell and Blake & Co. There are 10 pieces described in section II and one based upon rumor.

Some unusual features of that report are as follows:

(A) The name Agnell is mentioned six times as part of the lettering on numismatic items and eight additional times in historical language. The name Agrell is never used. There is no indication of knowledge that the name Agnell was a misspelling of the name Agrell.

(B) The first name of the person referred to as Agnell is indicated as unknown although the name John Agrell was published on December 29, 1855 etc. in the

Sacramento Union newspaper and otherwise.

(C) The middle initial of Gorham P. Blake is stated as newspaper content but does not seem to appear in any business announcement in a newspaper at the time.

(D) The \$20.15 Blake & Agnell rectangular ingot dated 1854 as previously

mentioned herein is included as Item 1.

(E) The death of "Agnell" was said to have occurred on or about December 29, 1855 and reference was given to the publication of Edgar H. Adams (1911-1913) as the source. A dissolution of the co-partnership by "mutual consent" was announced on December 29, 1855 as of December 27, 1855 in the Sacramento Union newspaper. Perhaps confusion came about from the publisher's inserted duration or interval signal which added (d 28-lw)" to the end of the dissolution announcement. No such date of death is indicated in the published study of Edgar H. Adams on pioneer gold (1911-1913).

(F) There is no mention of any G BLAKE ASSAYER gold bar dated 1854. This bar, as heretofore described, first appeared in a European auction in 1962 so New Netherlands might not have been familiar with it in 1953.

(G) The number of equidistantly spaced concentric circles on the pieces described as Nos. 5, 6, and 7 are respectively 18, 21, and 28, showing that the diemaker would

have had available in California a finely adjustable metal lathe during the 1855 period even though an "engine turning" machine was definitely not available.

(H) As to a Blake & Agnell unique \$25 rectangular ingot dated 1855 (Item 3) it is stated, "It is considered likely that other examples of this variety will turn up."

This forecast is irresponsible and has a tendency to create suspicion.

(I) No discovery or source information or provenance of any item is furnished in spite of showing an extensive familiarity with pioneer gold history.

(J) It was suggested that the BLAKE & AGNELL strip of three separate horizontal stampings was rejected for being underweight and therefore was kept as a souvenir by the assayers.

(K) The BLAKE & CO assay ingot with the name in an arc is not further described because it was not examined, but it seems to have the characteristics of genuine BLAKE & CO assay ingots subsequently salvaged from SS Central America.

The opinion of Eric P. Newman Numismatic Education Society as to the Blake and Agnell gold strip dated 1855 with three identical separate horizontal stampings was sent to the Norwebs on June 18, 1969 and contained the following major observations:

- (AA) That the souvenir status of the strip because it was slightly underweight to be cut into three \$25 size pieces was unjustified because it could easily be remelted or two pieces of full weight could easily have been cut from it and the remaining underweight portion remelted. An assayer keeping a souvenir of that value, easily reproducible, and with a misspelled name on it seems to be pure hype.
- (BB) No information as to the discovery, source or provenance of the strip was furnished in the detailed report or otherwise.
- (CC) It was pointed out that in the July 1959 advertisement of New Netherlands Coin Co., Inc., in <u>The Numismatist</u> that the advertisers had the "good fortune to devise a system of unearthing numerous unique pieces not previously known". Forecasting such a future not only was unreliable insight but forecasting the finding of unique pieces seems even worse.
- (DD) The same advertisement stated that "we have handled the most fabulous items imaginable". The word "fabulous" may be an advertising puff, but fabulous fundamentally means unreal.
- (EE) It was pointed out that Paul Franklin and John J. Ford, Jr. for many years had a business relationship, were close friends, and lived in communities close to each other in Long Island, NY.
- (FF) It was pointed out that Paul Franklin was the source of the previously unknown Parsons bar from Colorado and the source of the previously unknown Blake & Co. gold pieces struck with circular dies.
- (GG) It was pointed out that Paul Franklin testified at the Garland vs. Ryan arbitration hearings that he was a skilled machinist and gave full technical details of his knowledge of electrotyping.
- (HH) It was pointed out that Paul Franklin refused to testify at the Garland vs. Ryan arbitration hearings as to the source of the 1853 \$20 U.S.A.O.G. gold coins, one of which was the coin under consideration at those hearings.

(II) It was pointed out that John J. Ford, Jr. had told Eric P. Newman that Paul Franklin was the finest metallurgist that Ford had ever known.

There may be other unpublished opinions which will come to light.

S.S. CENTRAL AMERICA

Publicity about the immense amount of assay ingots, bars and coins salvaged from the S.S. Central America has not mentioned any item with the name BLAKE & AGNELL or BLAKE & AGRELL or AGNELL or AGRELL. The Sotheby Auction of 1999-2000 included only about 8 % of the find and that portion has 15 assay ingots of BLAKE & CO. The Sotheby catalog (pp. 84-87) mentions the name John Agrell in the historical section. As to the remaining 92% of the treasure another 19 more BLAKE & CO. assay ingots were found. There were no coins found with the name BLAKE on them. All assay ingots found contain no other name but BLAKE & CO. No salvaged pieces show any identical letter or numeral punches identical to any of the coins or bars containing the name BLAKE which were publicized before the Central America recovery. There is no challenge whatever as to the authenticity of the Central America pieces. There was no known opportunity to salt the wreck. The Yeoman-Bressett Red Book has included the listing of S.S. Central America pieces since 1994.

Naturally there must have been other genuine BLAKE & CO assay ingots which "missed the boat".

AN EARLY NUMISMATIC COPYING ERROR

Assuming that the misspelling of BLAKE & AGRELL as BLAKE & AGNELL on coins, bars and ingots discovered in the 1950s was copied from the typographical error in the 1912 Adam's publication there is a comparable American numismatic situation which occurred more than a century earlier.

The creation of the U.S. Dollar dated 1804 during the 1833-1834 period has a similar timing error relationship. Due to misinterpretation of the U.S. Mint records contemporaneously made for the year 1804 it was thought in the 1833-34 period that dollars dated 1804 had been minted in 1804. Thus dies for dollars dated 1804 were cut during the 1833-34 period and fantasy dollars were struck from them at the U.S. Mint. Subsequent evidence showed that the U.S. records covering 1804 were an accounting of the transfer of money within departments of the U.S. Mint and included only Spanish-American 8 reales coins (Spanish dollars) and /or U.S. dollars struck from dies dated 1803 or earlier. Thus the creation of dollars dated 1804 was exposed in 1962, etc. as having been influenced during the 1833-1834 period by a misinterpretation of a routine but somewhat ambiguous official report for 1804 which was misleading but not actually erroneous. (See Eric P. Newman and Kenneth E. Bressett, The Fantastic 1804 Dollar, 1962; Eric P. Newman, "A Restated Opinion on the Origin of the 1804 Dollar and the 1804 Eagle Proofs", Coinage of the Americas Conference 1993, American Numismatic Society, 1994).

As to both the Agnell spelling error and the misinterpretation of an 1804 records the copying from an earlier source to reach a subsequent inaccurate conclusion in each

situation seems to clarify and suggest the later date in each situation as the date of the creation of each of the fantasy pieces.

GENUINE FAKES OF BLAKE & CO.

The Chrysler Corporation in 1969 needed a gimmick to promote the introduction of its 1970 Golden Duster Valiant automobile. It undertook to copy for that purpose an 1855 \$20 Blake & Co. circular California pioneer gold piece which was the same size as the United States \$20 gold coinage. Chrysler had many, many thousands of copies reproduced in a brassy color using a mixture of non-precious metals. These were given away and avidly enjoyed by the public. (See the listing in Larry Spanbauer, Colonial Copies, Private Mint Replicas, Modern Counterfeits of United States Coins, Oshkosh 1975, p.4)

Thereafter inquiries concerning their value as rarities were enormous and the tales created by members of the public to support their genuineness and gold content defy the imagination. Numismatic columnists and others continually have had to disappoint the many inquirers over the years since then. In 1976 there was even litigation in Michigan over the ownership of one and the case was dropped when a jeweler determined that the coin had no gold content.

Some numismatists enjoyed the situation immensely because they felt hat a fake of a fake was truly comical.

IDAHO TERRITORY BARS

There are in existence at least five numbered bars principally of silver content.

punched with the words BLAKE & CO /ASSAYERS/OWYHEE, LT. as well as the fineness and value. The LT. is an abbreviation of Idaho Territory. Precious metals were discovered in the Owyhee area in 1863. The principal owner of the Blake & Co Idaho Territory business was apparently Francis W. Blake (Frank Blake) and a possible participant, Charles T. Blake, both relatives of Gorham Blake. These pieces have not been included in this study because they are (1) principally silver and not gold bars; (2) not issued until after 1863 and not during the Gold Rush period; (3) not geographically connected to California; and (4) from a different Blake & Co. firm from the prior Sacramento partnership of the same name with which Gorham Blake was a named participant. Several of the Idaho Territory pieces have been known numismatically since at least 1936 and 1937.

CONCLUSION, SCOPE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The chances of Edgar H. Adams in 1912 having his publication contain a spelling error identical to a spelling error allegedly made in 1854 or 1855 on coins, bars, or ingots which Adams had never seen or heard of is virtually nil. A chronological copying order of an error of this type seems to become a logical conclusion since the 1912 spelling error came first and then copying that error inadvertently in the 1950s could be a natural and logical happening. From the writings of researchers it appears that the misspelling was first exposed during research undertaken shortly before 1979. Copying mistakes often

constitute a solid proof of plagiarism or other improprieties as well as unchecked reliance upon previously published information.

Virus is involved. All of the pieces connected to such a forgery by die linkage, interlocked letter or number punches, incorrect spelling of AGRELL's name or other associating factors would be forgeries. This would include some pieces with the BLAKE & CO name. Any person creating such imaginative forgeries would not likely have limited such production to Blake related pieces, much to that person's discredit.

The scope of the data assembled for this research project and covered by it is limited to items which include the name BLAKE plus some other issues or issuers, associated or related to BLAKE matters. There have been omitted many pioneer gold observations which have a more distant association or a need for an independent review.

If there are any statements in the foregoing presentation which are inaccurate or ambiguous, or can be supplemented, clarified or improved upon, the writer welcomes suggestions. If the subject should be enlarged to include other pieces of pioneer gold the material for such items can be assembled individually or as a team effort. The subject matter is intriguing.

It is difficult to show that an existing item or items did not exist at the time they would have had to exist in order to be genuine. The proof of a negative is always a challenge. It is hoped that such a challenge has been reasonably presented.

Thanks are due to many who have over a long period of time shared their information with the writer and it is hoped that they and others will continue to do so.

Those who for whatever reason have preferred to hold back information or opinions in the past are welcome to furnish them at any time.

Would anyone like to purchase on an "as is" basis any gold coin, ingot or bar with the name BLAKE & AGNELL upon it?

September 2000

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92 — Twenty Dollars. Obverse, Large head of Liberty, as on the regular United States Double Eagle; w. M. & CO. on diadem; around the edge thirteen stars, and the date 1855 below. Reverse, An eagle with outstretched wings, shield on breast, a large olive branch in his right talon and three arrows in the left; above, on a label, the ends turned backward, 900 Thous. Around the device, SAN FRANCISCO CALIFORNIA above, and TWENTY DOL. below. Reeded edge. Lead.

This design is distinctly different from the gold piece of the same denomination struck by Wass, Molitor & Co. (51), and the above is the only impression known in any metal. It is illustrated through the kindness of H. O. Granberg, its present owner.

KELLOGG & CO.

93 — Fifty Dollars. Obverse, Head of Liberty surrounded by thirteen stars; the date 1855 below. Reverse, An eagle with scroll, etc., and legend as on 54. Edge reeded. Copper.

This is a trial piece from the regular dies of the denomination as issued by Kellogg & Co. (54), which has already been illustrated. An example sold for \$8 at one of Low's sales in 1903. One in proof condition, bought by Henry Chapman for \$15, is said to be now in the collection of George H. Earle, of Philadelphia.

94 — Twenty Dollars. Obverse and Reverse, From the dies of one of the 1854 or 1855 pieces issued by Kellogg & Co. Copper.

An uncirculated specimen brought \$1.10 in the Parmelee sale, where the description given is not sufficiently complete to identify it certainly with either of the four Kellogg issues in gold of this denomination (52, 53, 55, 56). Its present ownership is unknown, and there is a possibility that this and that next described are the same.

95 — Twenty Dollars. Obverse, Head of Liberty to left, and one of the best of the various heads; on the coronet, KELLOGG & CO. Around the border thirteen stars. No date. Reverse, A close imitation of the regular United States Double Eagle, as on 52 and 53. Copper.

An uncirculated impression from these dies, struck in copper, brought \$17 in Elder's thirteenth sale in 1907. H. O. Granberg has a specimen of the piece, in very fine condition, which he has kindly loaned for illustration.

BLAKE & CO.

96—Twenty Dollars. Obverse, Head of Liberty to the left, surrounded by thirteen stars; on the coronet, Blake & CO. Below is the date 1856. Reverse, An eagle similar to that on the regular United States Double Eagle, with a radiated cluster of stars above his head, the rays being somewhat thicker than on others similar. Around the edge, above, SACRAMENTO CALIFORNIA and below, TWENTY D. Milled edge. Brass and copper.

A specimen catalogued as struck in brass, gold-plated, and in fine condition, brought \$34 at the Wolfer also fine, struck in copper, was bought by a Mr. Sherman for \$2.50, at the Woodward Sate of June 12, 1266, and a fine impression in copper, probably the same piece, sold for \$1.75 at the Lettick Sate of 1664 are included as is now known, there are actually but two of these pieces, one of which is in the coi-

Felain 5

lection of Virgil M. Brand — that bought at the McCabe sale — and the other in that of Fred. T. Huddart, of San Francisco, which is in copper, and we are indebted to him for the opportunity to illustrate it.

This piece is of special interest as being the final effort of a contemplated renewal of private coinage in California. In 1856, owing to the limited operations of the San Francisco Branch Mint, and to the fact that not one of the private assay offices was making coins, the regular United States money became very scarce, and there was talk of a resumption of the issues of private bankers, which no doubt induced Blake & Co. to prepare the dies for a Twenty Dollar piece, from which this Pattern was struck.

Blake & Agnell conducted a gold-smelting and assaying plant at 52 J Street, between Second and Third Streets, Sacramento, in 1855. Later the firm was composed of Gorham Blake and W. R. Waters, and the name was changed to Blake & Co., under which title it was known from December 29, 1855, until some time in 1859, when Mr. Blake retired, and the business was continued by his partners as Waters & Co.

BALDWIN & CO.

1850.

97 — Ten Dollars. Obverse, The figure of a mounted vaquero riding to right, with lasso. Below is the date 1850. Above is CALIFORNIA GOLD and below TEN DOLLARS Reverse, An eagle with expanded wings; BALDWIN & CO at top between the tips of the wings, and SAN FRANCISCO below, with five stars on each side filling out the legend, as on 41. Various metals.

This trial piece, which undoubtedly was the work of Alfred Küner, follows closely the issue of the same denomination described under 41, but the dies, both of obverse and reverse, show a number of slight variations. On 41 the small s in DOLLARs lines with the bottom of the other letters, and is followed by a period; on this, the s is raised, to line with the top of the others; on the reverse of 41 the tip of the eagle's right wing extends to the edge of the piece; on this, it is not so long, and differs slightly in shape; a close examination shows other trifling differences. There have been restrikes, and it is said two impressions were taken in gold; the obverse die was also used to strike souvenir spoons before the great San Francisco fire.

1851.

98—Ten Dollars. Obverse, Head of Liberty to the left, surrounded by thirteen stars; BALD-WIN & CO. on the coronet; the date 1851 below. Reverse, An eagle with expanded wings, its head to the left; a branch of olive in the right and three arrows in left talon. Around the border S. M. V. CALIFORNIA GOLD and the denomination, TEN D. below. Brass.

The only known example of this variety is that which was catalogued in the Leavitt sale, held January 9, 10, 1891. The dies are those used for 44.

Idams



PATTERN AND EXPERIMENTAL PIECES OF CALIFORNIA.

AUKTION

Mittwoch, den 17., und Donnerstag, den 18. Oktober 1962, vormittags 9 Uhr, im Hotel Schweizerhof, Luzern

BANK LEU & CO. AG

Numismatische Abteilung Bahnhofstraße 32, Zürich Telephon 23 16 60

ADOLPH HESS AG

Haldenstraße 5 Luzern Telephon 24392

*1007 California Gold. GORHAM BLAKE, ASSAYER. Sacramento. \$ 33.68. Ingot 1854. G. BLAKE/ASSAYER/ SAC.CAL. Rv. 33.68 (inkus) DOLLS./900 (inkus) THOUS./1854. in Linienviereck. 57,3 g. Unique.

This is the first example of Gorham Blake's name alone on an ingot, and it is one of the heaviest recorded. This ingot has been in the possession of one family for at least 50 years.

*1008 UNITED STATES ASSAY OFFICE. 20 Dollars 1853. Adler mit Band im Schnabel. Darüber Band mit 900 THOUS. Rv. UNITED STATES ASSAY/OFFICE OF GOLD/SAN FRANCISCO/CALIFORNIA. 1853. Fr. 185. Sehr selten. FDC.

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Editorial Consultation and Supervision JOHN J. FORD, JR.

Compilation and Basic Research WALTER H. BREEN

Promotion and Distribution ALAN W. FAXON

PRIVATE GOLD COINS

BLAKE & CO. Sacramento 1855, 56



20 Dollars 1855—
Weight 507.7 gr. _____2 known
The first specimen was uncarthed by John J.
Ford, Jr. in 1953, the second in 1954.

20 Dollars 1856. Trial piece in copper of brass3 or 4 known

CINCINNATI MINING & TRADING CO. San Francisco 1849







Very Fine 5 Dollars 1849—Wt. 132.5 gr. Ex. rare

10 Dollars 1849-Wt. 258.3 gr. ... Ex rare



20 Dollars 1849. Trial piece in copper _

_2 known

DUBOSQ & CO. San Francisco 1850 smaller denominations under their own name, Wass, Molitor & Co. began to strike half eagles. Their coins first appeared on Jan. 8, 1852, and were highly praised by the *Herald* for not only their workmanship, but their value which was said to be 4% higher than the Mint's own coins.

Seeing that they were losing a good commercial opportunity, Moffat & Co. (ostensibly to prevent "less reputable firms" from doing so) resumed the issue of eagles. It has been stated that \$300,000 worth of these coins were struck, but Moffat's own correspondence gives the figure at \$86,500.

On Jan. 7, Secretary Corwin had sent new authority for the Assay Office to strike eagles and double eagles. Although this directive reached Moffat & Co. on the 17th, no public acknowledgment was made until the following month.

On February 14, John L. Moffat withdrew from the company which then reorganized as Curtis, Perry & Ward.

In early Autumn, another problem arose, or rather was created, because of a Treasury Department misconception. On Sept. 4, Acting Secretary Hodge instructed T. Butler King, the Collector of Customs at San Francisco, that Congress had prohibited the latter from receiving the issues of the U.S. Assay Office. As it turned out, Congress had done no such thing, but only insisted that all payments of public dues be made in coins of standard fineness. Accordingly, new dies were made, and the U.S. Assay Office, for the first time, began (at least theoretically) to fully refine its deposits to bring them into conformity with the Mint Standard.

One unsolved mystery is the issue of 1853 Assay Office coins of other than .900 fineness. These include a number of experimental pieces struck from dies for .900 fine coins, but with an actual fineness ranging (of those tested) from .888 to .910. Possibly related to these are the white metal trial pieces for an eagle and half eagle struck from dies with the fineness intentionally omitted. Since only .900 fine coins were acceptable at the Customs House, the likely explanation is that the Assay Office hoped to economize on its supply of refining acids (which were very difficult to obtain in California) by issuing other coins which could be redeemed upon demand for .900 fine specie. This is confirmed by the 1853 double eagles with the Moffat name, a specimen of which has been recently assayed at only .863 fineness. That this issue is attributable to Curtis, Perry & Ward is evident from the fact that Moffat had already given up his minting activities (for a diving bell business in the San Joaquin Valley), and relinquished the use of his name to his former partners.

The U.S. Assay office continued in operation until Dec. 14, 1853, when it closed its doors to make way for the newly established San Francisco Mint.

When, for lack of the acids necessary to do large scale refining, the San Francisco Mint got off to a slow start, private coinage once more resumed. A new company formed in 1854 under the name of Kellogg & Co. The proprietors were John Glover Kellogg, a former employee of Moffat & Co., and G.F. Richter, an assayer at the U.S. Assay Office. Late in the year the firm reorganized, and Richter was replaced by none other then Augustus Humbert. Kellogg & Humbert, Melters, Assayers & Coiners, continued in partnership until 1860, although no coins were struck after 1855. Interestingly, most of the known Kellogg fifty-dollar pieces were struck as proofs, and never entered circulation.

Another new firm was Blake & Agnell, who opened an assaying and smelting plant at Sacramento in 1855. Gorham Blake had already issued some bars in 1854 under the name of G. Blake Assayer. During the following year, in partnership with Agnell, he struck a number of double eagles, of which only two specimens are known today. With the death of Agnell late in the year, Blake formed a new partnership with W.R. Waters. During 1856, the San Francisco Mint closed down for repairs, but only two weeks later it reopened. Thus, despite a number of patterns for the 1856 Blake & Co. double eagle, it is not surprising that no gold impressions have turned up. Nevertheless, a \$25 Blake & Co. ingot as well as a number of assay bars of that date exist.

We should also note that during the year 1855, Wass, Molitor & Co. resumed

their coinage, country.

James William, house in San F in order to facilities

The 1851 San F were apparently former is now it

No explana sidering the direction.

A great magold rush days, prohibited all for of these pieces, inferred from the collectors who at there are also not 1/4 or 1/2, and are

In the same a group of eight change Co. to further engraved by Ha organizers of the George Abernat Smith are represever, being designment were cut by Victure initials "A"

One of the by the Mormon under the supervinto disrepute. A Pacific Co. coin i

known reasons, the possession of the following yearsumed, from d Mormon coins, the issue from p (though from ea gold strikes in Co

The discove the stuation in (Clark, Gruber & M. Clark, Milton Clark, Gruber & ing month. Consalloy, with the rewere made, and Even so, this reneral issues, in order

H. M. NAGLEE & CO.

Unique 78. (1850) Dectuple Eagle, ingot Smithsonian (Lilly) coll.

88. 1852 Eagle Small head, rounded bust. 89. 1855 Eagle

V.F. ABT. UNC. 1.250

800. 1.350.

JAMES KING

Unique

79, 1851 Double Eagle, ingot ex-Ford coll.

90-A. 1855 Double Eagle

Large head. Borderline R8.

90-B. Same, white metal trial piece. Unique. Ford coll.

1,400 1,850. 91. 1855 Double Eagle Small head.

3,500. 9,000. 92. 1855 Quintuple Eagle

DUNBAR & CO.

10,000. 80. 1851 1/2 Eagle Borderline R8.

SHULTZ & CO.

3,500. 81-A. 1851 1/2 Eagle R7

Unique 81-B. Same, trial piece Struck over silver Mexican peso 1847. J. Schulman sale, March, 1930.

SAN FRANCISCO STATE OF CALIFORNIA

82-A. 1851 1/4 Eagle, 1/2 Eagle, Eagle and Double Eagle (These pieces are almost always found in complete sets). Silver patterns. Set of 4, proofs

82-B. Same set of 4 pieces, copper 650.

600. 82-C. Same set of 4 pieces White metal.

SAN FRANCISCO STANDARD MINT

Unique 83. (1851) 1/2 Eagle. Trial piece Uniface rev. Tin. NN sale, 5/1953, ex McCoy.

84. (1851) 1/2 Eagle Restrike from San Francisco State of California obv. and San Francisco Standard Mint rev. Nickel. Rusty dies. High R7.

WASS, MOLITOR & CO.

750. 1,250. 85. 1852 1/2 Eagle Large head, pointed bust.

900. 1,500. 86. 1852 1/2 Eagle Small head, rounded bust.

350. 500. 87. 1852 Eagle Large head, pointed bust.

KELLOGG & CO.

350. 550. 93. 1854 Double Eagle Die varieties exist for this date and the

94. Same, but without date Copper pattern. R8. 1) Parmelee; 2) Haines-Wiggen? 3) Ely (bronzed).

575. 95. 1855 Double Eagle

96-A. 1855 Quintuple Eagle ... 22,500. Borderline R7. Most are proofs or impaired proofs.

96-B. Same, copper pattern. R8 1) Earle; 2) Lowe sale, 1903.

BLAKE & CO.

2 known 97. 1855 Double Eagle 1) Ford; 2) Smithsonian (Lilly) coll.

98. 1856 Double Eagle Patterns in copper and brass. High R7.

99. 1856 Twenty-five dollars, ingot Unique Ford coll.

UNITED STATES ASSAY OFFICE

V.F. ABT. UNC. 100. 1851 Quintuple Eagle \$2,750. \$3,500. Edge: AUGUSTUS HUMBERT UNITED STATES ASSAYER OF GOLD CALI-FORNIA 1851. .880 fineness. With 50 on

101-A. Similar, but without 50 2,500. 3,250.

Unique 101-B. Similar P.E. Struck in pewter. J. Schulman sale, March, 1930.



104. Above: Kellogg & Co. Below: Blake & Co.

Blake and Agrell

- 58San Francisco Chronicle, December 20. 1897, p. 7, col. 6. Also in San Francisco Examiner, December 20, 1897, p. 11, col. 3.
- 59Letter from Gorham Blake to Adams & Co., December 6, 1852. In Wells Fargo Bank History Room, San Francisco, California.
- 60What is a mystery, however, is the existance of an 1854 (BLAK)E & ARGELL Gold Ingot. Perhaps an unofficial partnership existed between the two men prior to their official announcement on November 12, 1855.
- 61 Sacramento Union, November 12, 1855, p. 2, col. 6. "St.Tr." refers to State Treasurer.
- 62_{Alta California}, November 25, 1855, p. 3, col. 1. This was quoted from the Sacramento Union.
- 63Sacramento Union, December 27, 1855, p. 2, col. 5. The name of John Agrell is not found in the Sacramento directory. It is possible Agrell never came to Sacramento and formed his partnership with Blake earlier than November 12, 1855, in some other location.
- 64Colville's Sacramento Directory for the Year Commencing May 1856 (San Francisco: Monson, Valentine & Co., 1856), Blake & Co. Assayers, 52 J, established in October 1853.

Blake, Gorham, of B. & Co. 52J, s, Mass. (the "s" means he's single) Waters, W. R. of J. Howell & Co. and Blake & Co., 52J, h cor Third and M. Mass. (the "h" means house) The following historical sketch is also listed: 'There are two establishments in the city for assaying gold, both situated on J St. That of Messrs. Blake & Co. between Second and Third, and that of Messrs. Harris, Marchand & Co., between Fourth and Fifth. Messra. Blake & Co. commenced business on the fifteenth of November last, and Messrs. Marchand & Co. in October; both have increased steadily in the amount of their assays since that time. The former in April, received for assaying, nearly 17,000 ounces of gold dust. We learn from them the fact, that the finest quality of dust is obtained in this country, and is worth twenty dollars and eleven cents per ounce, while the poorest that has come in under their observation is from Carson Valley, and valued at only \$12.13 per ounce.'

65 Adams mentions the 1856 copper and brass trial pieces but did not mention the Blake and Agrell pieces or the 1855 Blake & Co. piece with the coining press imprint. Adam's primary source was the Alta California; since there was no mention of these pieces, Adams may not have known of them. It is also interesting that both the \$25 and \$50 pieces misspelled the name Agrell the same way Adams did; unless of course, the newspaper was wrong. Again we could have a situation like "Shults" and Co. Until now, all other references have taken Adams at face value without checking his sources. Until more information can be found, there will continue to be some mystery surrounding the aforementioned issues.

For many years the origin of this company was a mystery. Recently uncovered references, however, while shedding some new light, also provoke new queries concerning this firm. provide new queries concerning ins from

Gorham Blake was born in Boston on May 26, 1829. In 1851, he became Superintendent of Iron Mines in Vermont, later moving to California by way of Panama in 1852, where he was soon employed by Adams & Company in Placerville. He later was engaged by Wells, Fargo & Company to purchase dust. Evidently Blake was quite ambitious, for by 1853 he became principal owner and superintendent of the Shaws Flat Ditch and had principal ownership in the Dardanelles Mine of El Dorado County.

In 1854 Blake moved to Sacramento and opened an assay office where he issued ingots under the name "G. Blake Assayer." He subsequently formed a partnership with John Agrell, and together they operated a gold melting and assaying plant in Sacramento from November 12, 1855, until December 27, 1855. First mention of this venture was printed in the Sacramento Union on November 12:

ASSAY OFFICE No. 52J Street, Between 2nd and 3rd Sacramento Blake and Agrell

Having established themselves in the business of Melting, Refining and Assaying of Gold and ore of every description, are now prepared and well qualified to execute business entrusted in them, faithfully and on the most reasonable terms.

Our assaying department is conducted by Mr. David Lundbom, who has been employed as Assistant Assayer in the U.S. Assay Office, San Francisco, from September, 1853, to January, 1854, and from that date to the present month as First Assayer at Messrs. Kellogg and Co. Assay Office, San Francisco [Kellogg dissolved in October].

We guarantee the correctness of our assays, and will pay all differences arising from the same with any of the United States Mints.

We respectfully refer to D. O. Mills & Co., Hon. S. A. McMeans, St. Tr., S. W. Langton & Co., Sacramento; Hon. J. M. Howell, Hon. B. F. Keene, A. W. Bee, Esq.; El Dorado County, Hon J. E. Hale. Hon. H. R. Hawkins, Placer County. n12-lm

A notice in the Alta Calfornia of November 25 mentions an influx of assay offices, one of the largest being Blake and Agrell.

Owing to the periodic closing of the United States Branch Mint in late 1855, Blake and Agrell (like Kellogg & Co. and Wass, Molitor & Co.) began issuing gold coins and ingots to fill the needs of the community. They presumably issued coins for little more than one month. The known pieces, however, bore the names of Blake and "Agnell." Why? It may have been a mistake and been impractical to change one letter on the dies, especially when they were a large company known by most citizens in Sacramento. This situation is similar to the misspelling on the "Shults" & Company pieces.

On December 27 Blake and Agrell dissolved their partnership by mutual

consent. The following was printed two days later in the Union:

DISSOLUTION—The Copartnership heretofore existing under the name of BLAKE & AGRELL is this day dissolved by mutual consent.

GORHAM BLAKE, JOHN AGRELL

Sacramento, December, 27th, 1855
The business will be continued on No. 52 J Street under the name of BLAKE & co. (d 28-lw)

In that same issue was printed the identical ad that had been running for the previous month and a half, but with the replacement of "Blake &

Co." for "Blake & Agrell."

Blake & Co. was evidently Blake and W. R. Waters, which issued \$20 gold pieces dated 1855, \$20 patterns dated 1856, and 1856 ingots. The 1855 issues probably were issued between December 27 and the new year. By the beginning of the new year, however, the United States Branch Mint in San Francisco, previously plagued by a lack of necessary acids, was back in full production and private mints like Blake & Co. were no longer necessary.

It is interesting that none of the California newspapers mention the Blake & Agrell or Blake & Co. pieces, but, then, neither do they mention some of the other issues known to us today. The company did not coin for very long, probably producing few specimens, which is one of the reasons

why these examples are so scarce.

Sometime in 1859, Blake retized and Waters reformed the company as Waters & Co. One account mentions that Blake "went East and started in business but returned to California finally to give his attention to investments which he had made here." He became one of the principal owners and superintended Shaws Flat Ditch. Later he became one of the owners of the Dardanelles mine in El Dorado County. On December 17, 1897, Blake died of apoplexy in Oakland, California, having lived in the area for a few years.

Blake & Agnell

Date

Denomination

Edge

Weight (gms./grns.)

Rarity





1. 1855

\$25

40.61/626.7

Unique

Specie Ingot

Obv. Inside tablet: BLAKE/&/AGNELL/ASSAYERS/SAC.CAL.

Rev. 25 (punched) DOLLS./900 (punched) THOUS./1855 inside tablet.





2. 1855

\$23,30

Unique

Obv. Similar to K1 above.

Rev. 10Z 5DWT/22CARAT/23DOLS 30C/1855.





3. 1855

\$50

83.24/1284.6

Unique

Coin Ingot

Obv. A round impression sunk on a rectangular planchet. SAC. CALIFORNIA GOLD. around top; 50 (punched)DOLLS. Coining press in center with SMV .900 on either side and 1855 below.

Rev. BLAKE & CO. around top. :: ASSAYERS:: around bottom, 50 in center with engine turned design (concentric circles) emanating from 50 to inscription.

An uncut strip of three \$25 size coin ingots exist.

This piece was probably struck in Sacramento during the last few days of December, 1855, between John Agrell's death a few days after Christmas and the end of the year.

Date Denomination Edge Weight (gms./grns.) Rarity





4. 1855

\$20

RE

32.90/507.7

R8

Unique

Obv. Similar to K2 but 20 DOLLS. and struck on round planchet

Rev. Similar to K2 but BLAKE & CO. instead of BLAKE & AGNELL and 20 in center.

J.H. Bowie

Date Denomination

Edge

Weight (gms./grns.) Rarity

8.60/132.7





1. 1849 \$5 PE Obv: CAL.GOLD above; 1849 below; a pine tree center.

Rev. J.H. BOWIE above; 137 GRS. below; 5/DOLLARS/879 center

A \$21/2 specimen is reported but not confirmed.





1. 1855 (\$20) Copper K1/PE Unique Coining press impression similar to regular K1, made from unfinished dies and struck over an 1848 large cent.





K1

Unique

2. 1855 (\$20)Copper Obv. Similar to 1 above but on blank planchet

Rev. Blank except BLAKE & CO. punched in around top, B double struck



(\$50)1855 White Metal K1/PE Die trial for a small monetary ingot. Octagonal with round impression similar to 2 above both obverse and reverse.

Blake & Co. continued

Date

Regular Design/Edge Rarity Denomination Metal R8 Copper

1856 Obv. Usual Liberty head and 13 stars except BLAKE & CO on coronet. Rev. Eagle similar to regular U.S. gold twenty dollar coins except SACRAMENTO CALIFORNIA around top and TWENTY D. below.

\$20



Unique \$20 White Metal 5. 1856 Obv. CALIFORNIA(arched)/1856(straight)/BLAKE & Co.(arched)/GOLD(straight) /THOUS.FINE(arched)/VALUE/DOLLS.CTS(straight) in center of ingot surrounded by square border, cross-hatched twice across ingot. Rev. BLAKE & CO. arched five times down center of otherwise blank reverse. Die Trial for a large size monetary ingot.

Blake & Co. continued

Date Denomination Metal Regular Design/Edge Rarity

6. 1856 White Metal /PE Unique

Obv. Similar to 5 above except smaller ingot and THOUS.900 replaces THOUS.FINE and only one cross.

Rev. Blank

Die Trial for a small monetary ingot similar to 5 above.

J.H. Bowie Co.

Date Denomination Metal Regular Design/Edge Rarity

1. 1849
 S1 Copper PE Unique
 Obv. J.H. BOWIE above, DOL. below, large 1 center. Around lower left side is 24G., around right 24C.
 Rev. CAL above; GOLD below, pine tree center.

Origin of Western assay bars fascinates Ford over the years

By Beth Deisher
COIN WORLD Staff

Where did the Western assay bars (ingots) that made their way into the U.S. marketplace primarily in the 1950s and 1960s come from?

It's the question John J. Ford Jr. has been asked many times. And it's a question he believes he's answered many times, both in conversation

and in print. But it's also one he loves to answer, because the answer provides a slice of modern numismatic history still relatively unknown by many of today's collectors.

First, Ford says, one must understand the terminology.

A Western assay bar is a gold or silver ingot of varying purity made by any one of hundreds of mid to late 19th century assaying firms located in California, Nevada, Colorado, Arizona and Idaho.

Most are called "unparted bars" because they have less than 900 parts gold, which means they

also contain high amounts of silver and smaller amounts of trace elements found in the ore when it was dug out the ground. Bars containing .900 fine or higher amounts of gold are called gold bars.

Most of the Western assay bars are rectangular and were made between 1849 and the early 1900s. Their primary function was to turn gold dust, gold nuggets and silver into a convenient, transportable and convertible form. Usually the bar carries the name of the firm that made it and is stamped with the fineness of gold or silver. Also stamped on it are its weight, value in dollars and cents, and an inventory or serial number. Those made after 1864 carry as small federal tax stamp.

Ford says his first encounter with a Western assay bar was in 1952 in

New York City.

"I saw my first real ingot in March of 1952, when I went up to see Wayte Raymond in his office on Madison Avenue and 59th Street. I was soliciting consignments for the 1952 American Numismatic Association sale. He had a little Blake & Co. ingot, which was in an envelope marked 'Blake & Co. IT – Indian Territory.' It didn't take me long to figure out that that was wrong because there were no mines in Indian Territory except coal mines."

The Blake & Co. ingot was placed in the 1952 ANA sale where it brought "\$50 or so," Ford recalls. "It was bought by a guy named Don

Keefer of Chicago."

Ford's next encounter with a Western assay bar came a few months later in November during a chance meeting with a friend from the Brooklyn Coin Club by the name of Paul Franklin.

"I had just come from Wayte Raymond's office where Raymond had paid me for a couple of articles I wrote for the Coin Collector's Journal. He paid me \$225. Franklin was walking out of New Netherlands

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office, which at that time was a big room in the middle of Scott Stamp and Coin Co.

"I said, 'What are you doing here?' He said, 'Well, I tried to sell Charles Wormser something, but he doesn't want it.' I said, What is it? He showed me a little gold bar – a Parsons & Co. \$20 – 1860."

At the time Wormser and Ford were partners in The New Netherlands Coin Co

Ford asked Franklin how much he wanted for the ingot. Franklin said Stack's had offered \$165 and Abe Kosoff had offered \$190. Ford checked with Wormser, who said he didn't want it because the book said that Dr. Parsons made his coins in Colorado in 1861. The ingot was dated 1860.

Ford went back to Franklin and bargained to buy the piece for \$225, the cash he had in his pocket. After acquiring the bar, Ford wrote to the Colorado Historical Society and various places to learn about Parsons. He found out Parsons was a doctor and that he died in Utah Territory in 1881. But he also learned that Parsons had arrived in Colorado Territory, which was really Kansas Territory, in 1860.

"When I was convinced the thing was real, I contacted Keefer and offered it to him for \$500 or \$600. Wormser knew about it. I made \$300 to \$400, which wasn't bad," Ford notes, because that was a lot of money in 1952.

Ford recalls, "The next thing I did was to call up Franklin and say, 'Hey, where did

you get that thing?""

Franklin told Ford he had gotten it from a friend of his who had been in the Army with him. The friend worked with the telephone company – Southwestern Bell. He had found it in a pawnshop and sold it to Franklin for \$100.

"I said to Franklin, 'Find some more of those!"

Franklin called his friend, who was supervisor of a crew of 15 that repaired downed telephone lines in the southwest. The friend encouraged his crewmembers to be on the lookout for the small gold and silver bars in pawnshops, jewelry stores, anyplace they could find them.

That was the beginning of a business relationship between Ford and Franklin that would last for more than 20 years.

When a line crewmember would locate a bar, he would call Franklin and describe it to him. By early 1953 Franklin and Ford were buying one or two bars a month. Ford bought some for his personal collection. Franklin bought some. Any that the two of them didn't want, Ford bought and then sold them to Keefer, who Ford says, "always dealt in cash."

The summer of 1953 found Ford, an agent for Wayte Raymond, vying for the Brock Collection, a large and important collection that had been given to the University of Pennsylvania. University officials decided to deassession it. But B. Max Mehl of Fort Worth, Texas, was also bidding for the collection.

"Mehl beat us out of it," Ford recounts.

There were bars and coins in the collec-

tion that Ford wanted. So Wormser, who had known Mehl for years, called Mehl and made arrangements for Ford to go to Fort Worth to see if he could purchase some of the material from the Brock Collection.

Ford says he took the train to Fort Worth and spent a week with B. Max Mehl. He said he looked at coins from 9 in the morning to 10 at night everyday and bought a large number of items from the collection.

"I liked Mehl's way of doing business." If he bought it for \$10 he'd sell it to you for \$11 or \$12, even if he didn't know what it was. He didn't try looking it up in a book. If he made a profit, it was a good deal."

While in Fort Worth, Ford asked Mehl if he had any ingots. Mehl said yes and that he kept them in a thread box because he didn't know what to do with them. He said he had sold a few from time to time and that he had taken some to the 1949 ANA convention in San Francisco. He said he had sold them to a guy from Iowa.

"As it turned out, Arthur Kagin bought them." Ford said he checked the November 1949 issue of *The Numismatist*, which reported "Don Keefer, B. Max Mehl, and another guy I had never heard of," had exhibited Western assay ingots at the convention.

Ford later met Kagin at an ANA convention and Kagin wanted to buy ingots. Now Ford had both Kagin and Keefer as clients.

Kagin wanted to display his ingots, but complained there was no way to do so. Ford suggested the idea of velvet-lined boxes and made arrangements for custom boxes to be made to display each ingot. Ford remembers that they cost about \$25 each. However, the box maker was slow in producing them, and Kagin eventually lost interest in displaying his bars in individual boxes.

Ford said he continued to develop Kagin as customer but "Keefer was getting sick and died in the late summer of 1954." In November of 1954 Ford bought all of Keefer's extensive collection from Keefer's widow.

As the business grew, Ford became suspicious of the appearance of some counterfeits in the market.

"I kept a list of ingots by serial numbers, denominations, and so forth and the names of who bought what. When I found there were two number 231s, I realized something was phony. I found out that a very prominent coin dealer at the time went to a jeweler and had cast replicas made. So there were several 231s."

Ford and Franklin continued to purchase ingots when they heard from contacts in the western mining states. But Ford decided to aggressively advertise to see if he could locate more. In late 1956 and early 1957 Ford produced flyers and posters that Franklin had agents post for him in the small western towns most likely to have the bars. Ford also advertised in mining journals and treasure magazines, especially

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FORD from Page 22

those geared to hobbyists using metal detectors.

Ford recalls, "One metal detector magazine recommend that readers find old roads that were in use in the 1880s and use the metal detector up to 100 feet of each side of the road. If some guy were being chased by a posse after knocking off a stage, he would get rid of the stuff. A lot of the times he didn't come back. He got killed. And the gold bars stayed in the ground."

The advertising worked. Franklin would go on buying trips and send the bars to Ford, who would find collector buyers. The business began to boom in the early 1960s, when Franklin started to buy hoards and more of the bars were of .900 fine gold and higher.

"I was getting so much of this stuff. From gun shows. I remember in 1969 I bought 27 ingots – spent \$40,000 to \$50,000. I bought *Brother Jonathan* ingots that way," Ford said. He estimates that during his career he has handled close to 500 Western assay bars.

Accounts of the hoards Franklin and Ford marketed are detailed in Chapter 12 of American Coin Treasures and Hourds by Q. David Bowers, published in 1997.

The early 1960s and appearance of more gold bars presented a problem. It was illegal for Americans at that time to own gold bullion. And new regulations and definitions with regard to collectors holding gold coins were being contemplated in govern-

ment circles.

Ford recalls that in August 1962 he and John J. Pittman, then a member of the ANA Board of Governors, traveled to Washington, D.C., to talk with Director of the Mint Eva Adams.

During the visit, Ford said he told her about "the ingot problem." The problem was that historical or Western bars had not been included in the regulations. According to Ford, the Mint Director went to see Thomas Wolfe, director of the Office of Domestic Gold and Silver Operations. It took several years of meetings and correspondence, but in June 1966 the Treasury Department issued its "Rare Gold Bar Statement" defining gold bars and setting up a licensing procedure to legalize the holding of such bars in numismatic collections.

Ford noted that the license applied only to gold bars of .900 fineness or higher. Unparted bars did not need a license.

Ford said he applied for and obtained a license for "about 75 gold bars. Other people got license, too." Based on information he gleaned from government officials and other collectors he estimates that approximately 100 such licenses were issued.

Ford says that he photographed every Western assay ingot he ever handled or saw and that he has maintained records of all of them. Many of the bars he sold made their way to famous collections and have been bought and sold regularly in the numismatic marketplace, especially in public auctions, in the last 25 years.

Ford scotfs that those who question the authenticity of the Western assay bars he and Franklin found and marketed in the 1950s and 1960s. Some even suggest that he and Franklin were involved in an elaborate counterfeiting scheme.

"You've got to realize that if I were a crook, the last thing I would do is invite the United States government to be a partner!" Ford exclaimed. He added, "95 percent of my net worth is in rare coins. Why would I compromise that? I can make more money being legitimate."

Ford insists he never had contact with a smelter and questions why a refiner would have risked selling him gold, when it would have meant risking his license to operate at the time. Playing devil's advocate, Ford questions where such bars could have been made or how they could have been made with the proper balance of copper, silver, iron, manganese and other trace elements in them.

Of his accusers, Ford said, "These guys are academics. They have no hint of pragmatism. They haven't the slightest idea that to make these things that you need molds, you need punches. First thing you need is to know what's in them. How would I have known all of this?"

Ford notes that Western assay bars, though not in the numbers he encountered them, continue to make their way into the marketplace. "These are bars that I've never seen or handled."

Ford predicts that as bars from the SS Central America (whose provenance is thoroughly documented) come to market, more American collectors will become fascinated and want items from the American Gold Rush era in their collections. They'll want them for precisely the same reason he's been fascinated by them all these years.

"They're sexy!" Ford says. GD



JOHN J. FORD JR. issued this flyer in 1957 to elicit sales of other Western assay bars. Ford purchased advertisements in many magazines seeking the bars.





Valuable, privately struck fifty dollar piece.



California State Assay Office bar, issued in 1850. U. S. Assay Offices made similar pieces, particularly "The United States Assay Office of Gold," San Francisco.





Small, unidentifiable gold bar, made early in the Gold Rush, to satisfy a strong demand for convenient mediums of exchange. Of interest, but most collectors prefer bars and ingots bearing the maker's name and location.



Unusually pure, long bar, made by Bates, Baxter & Co., about 1865, Mountain City, (Central City Dist.), Colorado Territory.



The fractional note at right was printed in Albany, N. Y., and was intended for use, 1851-52, in San Francisco Saveral firms made

cisco. Several firms made and issued their own paper money in the West, 1850-1897. Bank, Express and Mining Company drafts and checks are also of interest to collectors. While hardly as valuable price-wise as are many bars and ingots, such paper script is of great historical importance. Still, this money you can't spend is often worth more than the regular kind.



Gold ingot for \$272.23, made in New Mexico Terr., 1870-75.

At right, an electrum or mixed metal assay ingot, issued at famous Virginia City, Newada, by L. Kuh, a Chinese essayer, in the heyday of the great Comstock Lode.



PIOKING STATE



Silver bars are often found. This one, dated 1880, came from the Silver King mine. A great difficulty is locating data concerning these pieces.

WRITE TO

JOHN J. FORD, Jr.

COMPILER, THE SPECIALIZED CATALOGUE OF U. S. GOLD COINS, BARS AND INGOTS.

176 HENDRICKSON AVENUE

ROCKVILLE CENTRE, L. I., NEW YORK

MEMBER AMERICAN NUMISMATIC SOCIETY FELLOW OF

FELLOW OF ROYAL NUMISMATIC SOCIETY,
SOCIEDAD IBERO-AMERICANA DE ESTUDIOS

LIFE MEMBER, NO. 250, AMERICAN NUMISMATIC ASSN. SOCIEDAD IBERO-AMERICAN NUMISMATICOS, ACTIVE MEMBER, CALIFORNIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Send detailed description or careful pencil rubbing of any bars or ingots located; other material describe very carefully.

ALL CORRESPONDENCE ANSWERED. INFORMATION EXCHANGED, APPRAISALS GIVEN IN CONFIDENCE.

© 1957, JOHN J. FORD, JR.

INFORMATION CONCERNING

GOLD, ELECTRUM, SILVER BARS & INGOTS





WANTED!



From 1849 to about 1906, various individual Assayers, Private, State and even Federal Assay Offices, Bankers and Mining Companies, manufactured and issued bars and ingots. Composed of Gold, Silver, or a combination of both as a natural alloy (Electrum), these pieces originated in the territories and states of CALIFORNIA, ARIZONA, NEVADA, UTAH, NEW MEXICO AND COLORADO. Some have even been found from OREGON, WASHINGTON and IDAHO; others, from MONTANA and SOUTH DAKOTA, are said to have been made. In addition to these western bars and ingots, similar items were made about the country at the various U. S. Government Assay Offices, along with issues of Alaskan-Canadian manufacture (from the period of the Klondyke gold rush, 1897-99).

Sometimes crudely cast, often carefully finished, these precious metal bars and ingots were invariably stamped with the name of the issuer, sometimes with the place and date of manufacture. Almost all have the composition and fineness, the weight, and the value in Dollars and Cents also stamped upon them. Rarely, some are found with a stamp from a die, resembling a coin in appearance.

In the early days, Gold, Electrum and Silver bars and ingots were freely used as money, and are found with "even amount" denominations, such as Ten, Fifteen, Sixteen, Eighteen, Twenty, Twenty-Five, Fifty, One Hundred and Two Hundred Dollars. If dated, and from either California (1849 to 1856) or Colorado (1859 to 1862), issues of this type can be of great importance to a collector. However, the great proportion of these pieces, are found stamped with highly odd amounts (\$2.66, \$8.76, \$13.55, \$31.60, \$54.50 and so forth), representing their exact value at the time. Almost all of them are the results of conversion, by an Assayer, of raw dust or metal brought to him, assayed and put into identifiable form.

Tremendous numbers of these bars and ingots were issued by a great many individuals and firms. Only in recent years, have collectors and numismatists began the study of

them. While made in very high quantities, a large number of these pioneer bars and ingots were melted, either at the U.S. Mint in San Francisco, or as they were brought back east. Those that were saved or retained, were kepf as souvenirs or mementos, and are generally the very small pieces, although a few medium size ones have been discovered. Obviously, the really large ingots and bars (often made to discourage stage robbers and highwaymen), were worth considerably more as they found their way towards civilization, and few people could afford to hold onto any of them for sentimental or historical reasons.

While not rare in the literal sense of the word, the various bars and ingots made are now hard to find. Almost all are held by people as family curiosities, and must be searched out. Although only a limited number of collectors of coins and western material are interested in these pieces, those that are do pay substantial premiums (over the present day intrinsic or metal value) for them.

The value of a given bar or ingot is based upon how much is stamped upon it, when and by whom it was made, and its general appearance. The size of a piece means little or nothing. While a small gold ingot, marked Ten Dollars, and issued in 1852 could be worth ten to thirty times its present day bullion content of about \$16-17.50, a large gold piece might only command double the metal content. Electrum bars and ingots are of somewhat lesser importance than gold ones, and silver ones bring from \$15 to \$100 each, the latter figure only in rare instances.

Of equal importance to the actual bars and ingots themselves, is the historical data and background concerning them. Letters, correspondence, drafts, checks, broadsides, directories, and even contemporary newspaper accounts, relating to any individual or company that made bars or ingots is of interest and collector's value. Also collected are gold coins made in the west, patterns and trials in any metal for them, unofficial coin dies and hand presses, paper money privately made in any western state before 1890, the letter and numeral punches used for making bars and ingots, bar and ingot moulds and almost anything else concerning western coins, bars and ingots, 1849-1906.



Western Numismatic Americana



RADUALLY, during the past few years, we have become one of the most active, if not the largest dealer, in the pioneer and territorial gold field. Not only have we handled many of the better known rarities, but it has been our good fortune to devise a system of unearthing numerous unique pieces not previously known to Edgar H. Adams, Waldo Newcomer, Virgil Brand, Fred Boyd, or anyone else. In this connection, we might state that we have handled the most fabulous items imaginable. Some of them will appear for the first time in the new, thirteenth edition of the Whitman GUIDEBOOK; others will appear in the nineteenth edition of the STANDARD CATALOGUE next year.

Branching out from the regular privately-made gold coins, we were the first dealers to dig out, popularize, and deal in western assay ingots. In addition, we have scrutinized pioneer patterns and trials, unofficial coin dies, assay ingot punches, paper money privately made in the western states prior to 1890, and even bar and ingot moulds. Of late we have gone even further in our search of ANYTHING connected with the "Money of the West." We are keenly interested in the historical data and background contained in letters, correspondence, drafts, checks, broadsides, directories, and even contemporary newspapers. We own what could easily be considered the most comprehensive library on "Western Numismatic Americana" in existence.

Pioneer gold, particularly RARE pioneer gold, requires top-notch clients. We found the coins and ingots — and we have found the customers. Our clients, mainly because they are our clients, are well informed. They know that we deal in documented facts, not fanciful conversation. If the item is GOOD, we can pay a GOOD price on their behalf.

It will pay you to contact us if you have any of the following items, or know where to locate them!

- "Common" Pioneer or privately made gold coins in superlative condition;
 Ex. Fine to Proof.
- Pioneer Gold rarities in any condition.
- Unlisted and/or unpublished Pioneer Gold.
- · Assay bars and ingots.
- Pioneer patterns and trials; in any metal.
- · Western paper money, script, certificates, drafts.
- Any ephemera connected with the Numismatic West; from Assayer's letter punches to broadsides and even pertinent newspaper accounts.

IF IT'S WORTHWHILE, IT WILL PAY YOU TO DEAL DIRECT!

(Offers, appraisals, correspondence, transactions, in confidence)

New Netherlands COIN CO · INC · ONE WEST 47TH STREET · NEW YORK 36, N.Y.

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The Numesmatist July 1959

BLAKE & AGNELL: PIONEER COINERS AND ASSAYERS OF SACRAMENTO, 1854-62

NEW NETHERLANDS COIN CO. INC.

When the U.S. Assay Office ceased operations on Dec. 14, 1853, no other private firms were coining gold. The Assay Office plant was reconverted to house the newly authorize U.S. Branch Mint, Messrs, Curtis and Perry of the defunct Assay Office (and the old Moffat & Co. firm) having accepted a contract to furnish both building and machinery for the Mint. The only coins in circulation at the time were Assay Office "ingots" of \$50, \$20 and \$10, and Moffat & Co. coins, all other private issues having been discredited and melted down long before for recoinage into "ingots." The continuing influx of high-grade gold bullion found no outlet; the coins found little more than local circulation and no more were being made to replace those that were exported or paid into the Government coffers. To supply the acute local need John G. Kellogg and G. F. Richter, respectively cashier and assayer of the U.S. Assay Office, opened their own assaying office Dec. 19, 1853 in San Francisco, promising to pay off depositors in current coin. From Feb. 9, 1854 they began to coin. these deposits because current coin rapidly became unavailable -- most of it finding its way out of the country. This was understood to be a temporary expedient, "to supply any deficiency or vacuum which may arise before the Mint can commence operations, or indeed afterward"--according to San Francisco's leading commercial paper, the Prices Current, for Feb. 15, 1854. The vacuum indeed continued. The Mint began to coin on April 3, 1854, but results were not up to expectations. Congress refused to allow this branch to issue gold coins in other than the legal-alloy (900 Gold: Not over 67 Silver: Not under 33 Copper). California gold, in the native state, averaged 888 Gold: 108 Silver: 4 of other metals; though some deposits assayed higher in gold, none showed less than about 90-100 part silver per thousand. This meant that the branch mint had to subject each gold deposit to the tedious, difficult and expensive operation of parting (separation of the excess silver), which process required an enormous supply of nitric and sulphuric acids-and these could neither be manufactured locally nor shipped from the East in the necessary quantity. The branch mint's operations were quite small in 1854-5-6 for this reason, and the serious deficit of coin was partly made up locally by the Kellogg establishment, which was not required to subject its gold to parting.

The branch mint was long idle in 1854-55 (shut down prior to May 1, 1855) and again in the summer and fall of 1856, mostly for lack of parting acids, but on one occasion for repairs and fireproofing. The Kellogg firm ceased to coin in 1855, and in the meantime most gold coins continued to leave the country, or to begin a one-way journey to Washington. There is no reason to believe that the issues of Kellogg or the Mint achieved more than a brief and local circulation. Back in 1850 it was found expedient to have two State Assay offices, in San Francisco and Sacramento, since ingots or coins of the one city were not too likely to achieve much circulation in the other. The same situation persisted thereafter.

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It was in this context that Gorham P. Blake and ---Angell conducted an assaying and gold-smelting plant at No. 52 J Street (south side, between 2nd and 3rd sts.) in Sacramento, in and after 1854; ample testimony to their activity is found in city directories of that period. Since no private coiners were known to operate in that city, and the San Francisco coins rarely traveled the long distance to Sacramento, this firm (like most assayers of this and subsequent periods) returned deposits as bars or ingots with the weight, fineness, value and their name stamped thereon. Ingots of this type were issued by Moffat (1849), Kohler (1850), the U.S. Assay Office (1852-3), Parsons of Pike's Peak (1860), Clark, Gruber & Co. (1861-2), and dozens of less well known assayers. Until recently they were issued also by

the various branch mints. We can take it for granted that this was the normal procedure of assayers. In Sacramento of 1854, precisely because there were no private coiners and few gold coins of any sort (U.S. Ormsby, Sacramento's only known previous coiner, had ceased to operate in 1850 when the abortive State Assay office attempted to circulate its own ingots), the bars issued by assayers could and did achieve a limited circulation as money.

Assay Office ingots of 1849-50 circulated, though Adams (p. 15) quotes a local newspaper of the time to the effect that as coins these bars were a failure.

The first known issue by Blake & Angell is a \$20.15 ingot dated 1854, with the firm name embossed on the four narrow edges. It shows considerable evidence of circulation. It is of native California gold, readily recognizable as such by the color, and now weights 32.88 grams (507.4 gr.), which at 900/1000 gold, 100/1000 silver (fineness stamped on the reverse) makes \$19.80-1/3, reasonable in view of its well worn condition. There is some reason to believe that this, like most other issues by this firm, was intended as a sort of currency. The denomination was evidently intended to be \$20.00 but it is difficult to achieve exact weight in molded ingots without specialized equipment such as is unlikely to have been available in Sacramento of 1854. The highly unusual edge device suggests an intention to forestall clipping or shaving. It was subsequently abandoned on ingots. The exact computations on this (No. 1) and subsequent known Blake & Agnell and Blake & Co. piecesiwill be found in Part II.

It is entirely logical, as we have seen, that these assayers would have known that their product could relieve the acute shortage of coined gold. That they would have attempted to further this situation also follows. The transition from ingot to actual coin only awaited the manufacture of dies—a huge sledge—hammer could substitute for a screw press, as it certainly did with the firm of Broderick & Kohler (Pacific Co.) in 1849.

It is therefore not unexpected to find No. 3 in the corpus of Blake & Agnell issues to be an oblong \$25 ingot, with firm name on obverse from a logotype or rectangular die, and with reverse 25 DOLLS./900 THOUS./1855 from a similar rectangular die, the 25 and 900 being impressed on the piece with separate punches. This also shows some circulation; its purpose as a coin is evident, both from the inscriptions and the denomination. The reverse die leaves no room for doubt that an exact number of dollars (probably 10, 25, 50) was intended for each piece; by now some care was evidently taken to measure out the melting so that a minimum amount of trimming would be necessary, an exact value in dollars being obviously more conductive to an ingot's acceptance as currency—especially a round number like \$25—than an unwieldy figure like \$23.30 (No. 2) or \$37.31 (one of the Kohler-State Assay Office bars). I suspect that it was precisely the odd "denominations" \$37.31, \$40.07, \$54.09, etc., that led to the failure of the Assay Office and Moffat ingots as currency; prices were generally quoted to round numbers, multiples of five, and seldom did the coins appear with which one could then make change for \$37.31.

That coinage was in fact the intention of Blake & Agnell is proved by No. 5, which is a \$50 piece of irregularly oblong shape, with round dies; its obverse depicts a coin press and bears the legend SAC. CALIFORNIA GOLD SMV .900 1855 50 (punched in) DOLLS., its reverse BLAKE & AGNELL ASSAYERS around concentric circles, 50 in center. The obverse die of this piece, showing what was probably the screw press (Ormsby's?) this firm used to make its coins, was also used on at least two gold \$20 pieces which are of the conventional round shape and standard size, having finely reeded edges. The reverse used on these twenties is similar to that on the \$50 but reads BLAKE & CO. ASSAYERS and has 20 punched in center. A

copper trialpiece from these dies exists, the planchet being an 1848 cent. A silver trial of the obverse also exists, of the exact size of a Humbert \$50 but exactly twice as thick, with no denomination punched in before DOLLS., and with BLAKE & AGNELL ASSAYERS SAC. With no denomination punched in before DOLLS., and with BLAKE & CO. being punched over. CAL. (like No. 3) unsuccessfully rooled off reverse, BLAKE & CO. being punched over. According to Adams, Mr. Agnell died on or about Dec. 29, 1855, and this piece and the twentie must have been made shortly afterwards a The & Co. of Blake & Co. stands for W. R. Waters, who outlasted Mr. Blake; the firm was known as Blake & Co. until 1862. Thereafter as Waters & Co., according to Sacramento directories of 1861-64. What happened to Gorham Blake, once a Capt. of the Guard in Sacramento Commandary No. 2, Knights Temples is not known. Ithas been conjectured that he went to Idaho Territory and there issued the BLAKE & CO. IN OWYHEE, T.T. (Idaho Territory) bars.)

To backtract slightly, one of the more interesting of the Blake & Agnell issues is No. 4, an uncut strip of about three times the length of the \$25 ingot previously mentioned. On obverse the same die as No. 3, reading BLAKE & AGNELL /ASSAYERS/SAC.CAL., is three times punched in; on reverse a die of the same sort but larger than on the \$25 is punched in, once inverted, the other times correctly. This piece weights 1900.8 grains, but no denominations have been punched in (evidently because the three segments had not been severed, weighed and trimmed). That it represented a stage in the manufacture of oblong coins like the \$25, No. 3 above, is proved beyond doubt by the character of the dies, etc., the intent evidently being to make this strip into three ingots similar in all respects to No. 3. Study of this strip enables us to determine many interesting facts about the manufacturing methods used by this pioneer firm of coiners. The dies were made by hand, a single set of punches being used for the letters on both sides. Their size testifies to the size of molds in which the gold melt was allowed to solidify. The single inverted reversemakes clear how the coins were made. The strip was removed from the mold (probably a rectangular pan), and placed on an anvil bearing what we have called the obverse die, that showing the firm name. The workman (Agnell?) took hammer and upper die (punch might be a better word) and applied several sharp blows, making sure that upper die and lower die were approximately aligned in order that a sharp impression of both sides would result. Very slight double striking, visible with a glass, is characteristic of most known impressions, and this is of exactly the character that would be expected from the above-described process. Evidently the workman discovered after he had made the first impression on the strip that he had been holding the punch upside down; this was corrected on the other two making up the strip. All three impressions of the value and fineness die show that 900 was punched in before THOUS., exactly as on the \$25 ingot No. 3' but no attempt was made to sever this strip into three ingots and release it into circulation. We may assume that the denominations would have been punched in after severing, weighing and trimming. Why this was not done to this particular strip is hard to say. The error of inverted reverse would hardly suffice to explain it. The weight of 1900.8 grains gives 1710.72 grains gold, 190.08 grains silver, or \$73.6744 gold, \$0.5120 silver, total \$74.1864. It was evidently some 18 grains of gold and 2 grains of silver short of the desired \$75 total which would make three \$25 ingots. (Theory would give \$25=576 plus grains gold, 64 plus grains silver; \$75 correspondingly triple those figures.) There is insufficient room on the die to crowd in something like 24.73 before DOLLS. The strip was short weight and blundered to boot; therefore let it be kept as a souvenir while we get on to the next melt--such might have been the thought of Blake, upon seeing this unique oddity. teta seks. Breve est est about the beauty of the extension

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II. The Known Issues of BLAKE & AGNELL and BLAKE & CO.

- 1. 1854 Ingot, \$20.15. Rectangular, about 1-1/4" x 1/8". Obv. S.M. VALUE / 20 DOIS. 15C / 1854 in three lines. Rev. GOLD 900 / SILVER 100. These letters and figures stamped in from individual punches. The four narrow sides, corresponding to the edge or thickness of a regular coin, are lettered (in all four times) with parts of (BLAK)E & AGNELL, this lettering embossed or raised above the surface, evidently to prevent clipping or shaving. The same sort of device was used by Droz in 1791 (the circle brisée) and on some nineteenth century gold and silver coins; it reappeared in Snowden's patent dollar of 1885, St. Gaudens gold and modern Mexican silver. Probably intended as a coin, this ingot has had considerable circulation. Present weight 32.88 grams, or 507.4 grains. At 900 AV: 100 AR, this would come out to 456.66 gr AV = \$19.66 2/3 and 50.74 gr AR = .13.2/3, total \$19.80 1/3.
- 2. 1855 Ingot, \$23.30. Rectangular, about 1 3/8" x 1 1/16". Obv. BLAKE / & / AGNELL/
 ASSAYERS / SAC. CAL., in five lines, the whole in a rectangular depression,
 the lettering raised. The fabric indicates that this was made from a logotype or rectangular die, presumably impressed on the ingot by sledgehammer;
 in No.s 3 and 4 four other impressions from this die, showing the identical
 peculiarities, amply verify this. Rev. In four lines, 1 OZ 5 DWT / 22 CARAT
 ones earlier used to make the obverse die. At the stated weight, 600 gr,
 if we assume the alloy to be wholly silver, this becomes 550 gr AV +\$23.643
 and 50 gr AR + .135, total \$23,778. This, because of the odd denomination,
 may have been intended as an assay ingot, but it too apparently got into
 circulation.
- 3. 1855 \$25 Coin Ingot. Rectangular, about 1 13/64" x 1 1/32". Same obverse die. Rev. 25 (punched) DOLLS. / 900 (punched) THOUS. / 1855, in three lines, the lettering and date embossed as on obverse and from the same punches, the whole within an embossed rectangular enclosure, the configuration evidently from a similar rectangular, die. No weight shown on the coin, but theory would give total 640 and a fraction grains comprising 576+ gr AV, 64+ gr AR. This, like No. 1, shows extensive signs of circulation. It now weighs 40.6 grams = 626.56 gr, giving 563.9 gr AV = \$24.283 and 62.656 gr AR = .168+, total \$24.451+. The amount of circulation fully accounts for the thirteen grains short weight. It is considered likely that other examples of this variety will turn up.
- 4. 1855 Strip of three intended for \$75. Oblong, about

 die as last, impressed three times. Rev. Similar to last, once inverted,

 twice upright (as explained in Part I); differs in area of rectangular en
 closure, suggesting that the coinage of this firm must have been fairly ex
 tensive if it required a second reverse for the same denomination. Perfect

 condition. Weight 1900.8 gr comprising 1710.72 gr AV = \$73.6744 and 190.08 gr

 AR = .5120, total \$74.1864, as described. Underweight reject kept as a souvenir;

 probably the only one so made, though doubtless other, perfect, strips cut

 up into regular \$25's.

- 5. 1855 \$50 Coin Ingot. The shape is that of a rectangle swollen in center evidently from impress of large circular dies. Length 1 11/16", greatest breadth 1 7/16", smallest (end) breadth 1 1/8". Obverse, a coin press; SMV .900 under arms, smallest (end) breadth 1 1/8". Obverse, a coin press; SMV .900 under arms, smallest (end) breadth 1 1/8". Obverse, a coin press; SMV .900 under arms, smallest (end) breadth 1 1/8". Obverse, a coin press; SMV .900 under arms, smallest (end) breadth 1 1/8". Obverse, a coin press; SMV .900 under arms, smallest (end) breadth 1 1/8". Obverse, a coin press; SMV .900 under arms, smallest (end) breadth 1 1/8". Obverse, a coin press; SMV .900 under arms, smallest (end) breadth 1 1/8". Obverse, a coin press; SMV .900 under arms, smallest (end) breadth 1 1/8". Obverse, a coin press; SMV .900 under arms, smallest (end) breadth 1 1/8". Obverse, a coin press; SMV .900 under arms, smallest (end) breadth 1 1/8". Obverse, a coin press; SMV .900 under arms, smallest (end) breadth 1 1/8". Obverse, a coin press; SMV .900 under arms, smallest (end) breadth 1 1/8". Obverse, a coin press; SMV .900 under arms, smallest (end) breadth 1 1/8". Obverse, a coin press; SMV .900 under arms, smallest (end) breadth 1 1/8". Obverse, a coin press; SMV .900 under arms, smallest (end) breadth 1 1/8". Obverse, a coin press; SMV .900 under arms, smallest (end) breadth 1 1/8". Obverse, a coin press; SMV .900 under arms, smallest (end) breadth 1 1/8". Obverse, a coin press; SMV .900 under arms, smallest (end) breadth 1 1/8". Obverse, a coin press; SMV .900 under arms, smallest (end) breadth 1 1/8". Obverse, a coin press; SMV .900 under arms, smallest (end) breadth 1 1/8". Obverse, a coin press; SMV .900 under arms, smallest (end) breadth 1 1/8". Obverse, a coin press; SMV .900 under arms, smallest (end) breadth 1 1/8". Obverse, a coin press; SMV .900 under arms, smallest (end) breadth 1 1/8". Obverse, a coin press; SMV .900 under arms, smallest (end) breadth 1 1/8". Obverse, a coin press; SMV .900 under arms, smalle
- 6. 1855 \$20. Same obverse as last, 20 punched before DOLLS. Rev. Similar, 21 circles around punched 20, BLAKE & CO. ASSAYERS: borders and letter punched as circles around punched 20, BLAKE & CO. ASSAYERS: borders and letter punched as on No. 5 Round, and the size of a regular double eagle. Finely reeded edge. Two on No. 5 Round, and the size of a regular double eagle. Finely reeded edge. Two on No. 5 Round, and the size of a regular double eagle. Finely reeded edge. Two on No. 5 Round, and the size of a regular double eagle. Finely reeded edge. Two on No. 5 Round, and the size of a regular double eagle. Finely reeded edge. Two on No. 5 Round, and the size of a regular double eagle. Finely reeded edge. Two on No. 5 Round, and the size of a regular double eagle. Finely reeded edge. Two on No. 5 Round, and the size of a regular double eagle. Finely reeded edge. Two on No. 5 Round, and the size of a regular double eagle. Finely reeded edge. Two on No. 5 Round, and the size of a regular double eagle. Finely reeded edge. Two on No. 5 Round, and the size of a regular double eagle. Finely reeded edge. Two on No. 5 Round, and the size of a regular double eagle. Finely reeded edge. Two on No. 5 Round, and the size of a regular double eagle. Finely reeded edge. Two on No. 5 Round, and the size of a regular double eagle. Finely reeded edge. Two on No. 5 Round, and the size of a regular double eagle. Finely reeded edge. Two on No. 5 Round, and the size of a regular double eagle. Finely reeded edge. Two on No. 5 Round, and the size of a regular double eagle. Finely reeded edge. Two on No. 5 Round, and the size of a regular double eagle. Finely reeded edge. Two on No. 5 Round edge.
- 7. 1855 Copper trailpiece of same obverse with different reverse. This is on a central central of 1848, somewhat cut down or else much worn (151.7 gr). No denomination in punched in; reverse shows 28 concentric circles, and since only a central impression is taken, no legends are visible.
- 8. 1855 Silver trialpiece of same obverse; without denomination punched in, round, edge coarsely reeded, and reverse blank except for BIAKE & CO. punched in a curve convex upwards as on the 1866 BLAKE & CO. OWYHEE ingots. Diameter 1 17/64"; wt. 287.8 gr.
- 9. 1855 (\$100) Silver octagonal trailpiece of same obverse; no denomination punched in, but this is exactly the size of a Humbert \$50 and double the thickness, evidently made to show what a \$100 would look like. Diameter from side to opposite side, 1 3/4"; thickness, 9/32". Reverse once had an impression drom (presumably) the die of No. 2 BLAKE / & / AGNELL / ASSAYERS / SAC. CAL., parts of which are still visible though (evidently on account of the death of Agnell) the punch has been scraped off and the curved logotype BLAKE & CO. impressed exactly as on No. 8. Obverse die now slightly buckled in a straight line from first A in CALIFORNIA to between DO in DOLLS. Faintest traces of this buckling are visible on previous impressions. No rust.
- 1856 Round trialpieces for a double eagle imitating the U.S. Mint's type; the only Blake issue known to Adams, and listed by him as No. . . Copper (2); copper-gilt and brass, one each reported. The dies seem to be of Eastern manufacture.

A Blake & Co. ingot of larger size is also reported to exist with the curved logotype.

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ERIC P. NEWMAN NUMISMATIC EDUCATION SOCIETY

6450 Cecil Avenue, St. Louis 5, Missouri

June 18, 1969

Mr. and Mrs. R. Henry Norweb 9511 Lake Shore Blvd., Cleveland, Ohio

Dear Emery May and Harry:

800 200 m.

You have asked our opinion with respect to the genuineness of a BLAKE AND AGNELL, Sacremento, California, gold bar
consisting of three adjacent stampings on one side reading
"BLAKE AND AGNELL/ASSAYERS/SAC.CAL." and three adjacent stampings on the other side reading "DOLLS./900 THOUS./1855". One
set of the stampings is inverted in relation to the other two.
The denomination is not stamped anywhere into the strip bar
as it is in single units made with the same die punches.

You have sent us a copy of a write up prepared by the New Netherlands Coin Company, Inc., entitled BLAKE AND AGNELL: PIONEER COINERS AND ASSAYERS OF SACRAMENTO 1854-62. This draft gives no provenance or pedigree on the prior ownership of any of the items or any information as to their first numismatic discovery. It does give other technical information as to weight, fineness, content, etc.

You indicated that the strip bar was bought by you from John J. Ford, Jr., about 1953. A theory for the existence of your bar was presented in the New Netherlands Coin Company, Inc., write up, namely, that due to the short weight of the strip bar it was kept as a souvenir. This theory is, in our opinion, quite unsound. Two full weight \$25 bars could have been cut off the strip and the balance thrown back in the melt or stamped an odd amount as was said to have been done. For an assayer to keep the strip in its present form was, therefore, pointless.

The entire problem with respect to this bar is whether any of the BLAKE AND AGNELL bars are genuine or not. If they are genuine the parties who discovered them are in a position to give data with respect to their source but no such data has ever been made available. Paul Franklin, through whom these pieces apparently made their first numismatic appearance

ERIC P. NEWMAN NUMISMATIC EDUCATION SOCIETY

6450 Cecil Avenue, St. Louis 5, Missouri

Page 2 Mr. and Hra, R. Henry Herweb

June 18, 1969

refused to testify as to the source of the \$20 1853 United States Assay Office 900 gold fine coins which were in issue in the Garland vs. Ryan arbitration in 1966-68. Paul Franklin is also the source of the Parsons bar (Colorado) which is the first of the theretofore unknown bars to appear. He is also the numismatic source of the BLAKE & COMPANY circular coins. The exact business relationship between Paul Franklin and John J. Ford, Jr., is complicated as they were close friends and lived close by in Long Island for many years. John J. Ford, Jr., once told me that Paul Franklin was the finest metallurgist Ford had ever known. Franklin in the Garland-Ryan hearings explained the process of electrotyping with full technical detail and described his ability as a machinist. He also dealt in coins.

No catalogue ever had the Parsons, the Blake, the Blake and Agnell, and other pieces listed in them until these were put into the Red Book in 1952 and thereafter and into the Standard Catalogue. These insertions were apparently based upon information volunteered by John J. Ford, Jr. All such entries have now been withdrawn from the Red Book except the Parsons bar. The Standard Catalogue is no longer published. A Blake and Agnell \$25 bar was in an advertisement of the New Netherlands Coin Company, Inc., in the July, 1959 Numismatist. This ad states that "it has been the New Netherlands Coin Company's good fortune to devise a system of unearthing numerous unique pieces not previously known. It further states that "we have handled the most fabulous items imaginable". We do not understand how one would legitimately devise a system to discover numerous unique pieces. The word "fabulous" means "unreal". It is the strangest advertisement we have ever seen and belies itself.

Under the circumstances we feel that the burden of proof is on those who sold the strip item to you to establish its provenance; otherwise the piece should be construed to be artificial. We feel that when facts are available and are not disclosed that you have the right to rely upon the failure to disclose facts as being indicative of the fact that their disclosure would undermine the genuineness of the piece. There are too many unknown pieces which have appeared since 1952

The stars on altered pieces are punched in and many times show nothing but uninterrupted metal, with no lines whatsoever. Other times, circular lines may be present in the altered star.

Overall, look for well-defined die polish and appropriate luster. Sharpness in the letters and digits is not as useful for authentication in the commemorative series as it is for regular-issue coinage, due to the roundness typically found in these features on genuine commemorative coins.

Territorials

Surprisingly little U.S. territorial gold coinage has been forged. Besides the common replicas of the California fractional gold series, counterfeits are limited primarily to the United States Assay Office of Gold issues of 1852 and 1853. The most common of these is the 1853 Assay twenty-dollar coin.

This counterfeit piece is prooflike in appearance and rounded in its details, and exhibits several depressions that repeat from fake to fake. The genuine Assay issues have sharp details and a great deal of die flow in the fields, and are well-defined pieces.

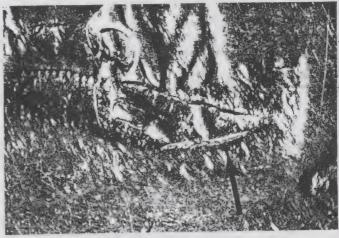
On the counterfeit, look for a repeating depression on the base of the branch being held by the eagle. This depression, which looks like a bag mark, is a key counterfeit diagnostic. Also, a repeating depression is seen in the field between the legend and the banner on this issue.

The counterfeit version of the 1852 ten-dollar Assay piece is likewise prooflike, and exhibits repeating depressions. The most prominent is a circular depression between the N and I of CALIFORNIA on the reverse.





Counterfeit 1853 United States Assay Office twenty-dollar gold obverse and reverse.



Close-up of counterfeit 1853 United States Assay Office twenty-dollar gold obverse. The arrow points to the depression near the end of the branch.



Close-up of counterfeit 1853 United States Assay Office twenty-dollar gold obverse. The arrow points to the depression in the field between the legend and banner.

Genuine pieces do not possess the prooflike appearance of the counterfeit. Rather, their fields are rough and textured, with considerable die flow. The devices, letters, and digits on the genuine pieces are sharp and well-defined, erupting from the fields and having sharp, angular, features.

Other than these two deliberate counterfeits, the rest of the territorial coins found in fake form are common, cheap replicas. These are made of base metal and are detected easily by the presence of a seam along the edge. Also, the weights of these replicas are considerably lower than what they should be.

Bowers and Ruddy Galleries-Western Numismatic Americana

Blake & Agnell \$23.30 Gold Ingot, 1855





See Color Photo

Blake & Agrell, Assayora, Sacramento. \$23,30 gold ingot marked "Blake & Agnell."

Front of the ingot consists of a prepared stamp which reads in several lines: BLAKE / & / AGNELL / ASSAYERS / SAC CAL. The edges are plain. The back consists of the following inscription from individual letter and numeral punches: 1 OZ 5 DWT / 22 CARAT / 23 DOLS 30 C / 1855. Believed to be unique.

The only example known to exist.

(\$27,500-35,000)

Obtained indirectly from Paul Kagin in 1972.

1855 Blake & Co. \$20 Trial Piece









12 Blake & Co., Assayers, Sacramento. \$20 die trial on a United States large cent. Extremely Fine or better, virtually as minted. Some unevenness of strike due to the method of preparation.

To strike this piece an 1848 United States copper cent was used. The reverse of the cent was placed against a blank of metal, perhaps a blank die, with engine turning.

The obverse die of the Blake & Co. \$20 is impressed on the obverse side of the large cent. The diameter of the large cent, even allowing for expansion and spreading under pressure, was not sufficient for all of the inscription to be fully present, but the letters can be essily read. At

See Color Photo

the center is a hand-operated screw-type coining press, with the inscription SMV (for "Standard Mint Value") to the left and .900 (referring to the fineness) to the right. Surrounding is the inscription SAC. CALIFORNIA GOLD. DOLLS. On finished pieces (refer to page 282 of Donald H. Kaşın's Privite Gold Cains und Putters of the United States) the denomination of a particular issue (in the Kaşın illustration \$20) was punched in by hand.

This identical piece, described as unique, is illustrated on page 334 of the Kagin reference. (\$4000-6000)

G.W. Bell \$21 Gold Ingot









See Color Photo

10 G.W. Bell, Assayer, San Francisco. \$21.00 gold ingot. Extremely Fine. Some normal minor marks. Probably unique as a denomination

This bar contains more elaborate inscriptions than the preceding and is dated 1860, the year of Bell's death. It probably was among his last productions

Examination of the piece under magnification reveals many in read: \$21.00 / C.W. BELL / ASSAYER / 1 OZS 3 DWT / SILV 111 / 66 / GOLD / 885 / FINE. Magnification reveals that the word "SILVER" at the end of the bar has the last two letters overstamped with the numerals 111. The inscriptions reveal that the piece is made of 885 parts gold, 111 parts silver, and by implication, 4 parts of impurities.

The edges of the bar are plain.

The back has at the center a light Impression of the U.S.I.R. tax stamp (Act of June 30, 1864) over which is stamped in individual letters: G.W. BELL / ASSAYER / 1866. To the left of the inscription is the serial number 1592.

Further examination reveals a lightly engraved inscription on the back, possibly indicating that the piece was given as a gift at one time. This inscription seems to read "A.T. to HAT." (\$12,000-13,500) (\$12,000-13,500)

Obtained from John J. Ford, Jr., 1969, who maidred it from Paul Franklin.

CONSIGNMENTS WANTED!

We're now accepting consignments for our next auction. Please write or call today for complete information!

Blake & Agrell - and -Blake & Company

Blake & Agrell conducted business as a partnership in Sacramento in 1855. An advertisement noted:

Assay Office 52 | Street between 2nd and 3rd Sacramento. Blake & Agreti, having established themsalves in the business of Melting, refining and Assaying of Gold and ore of every description, are now prepared and well qualified to execute business entrusted in them, faithfully and on the most reasonable terms ... we guarantee the correctness of our assays and will pay all differences arising from the same with any of the United States Mints .

Later in the same year the partnership was dissolved, and a new firm, Blake & Co. was formed. This consisted of Corham Blake and W.R. Waters. This firm produced various issues dated 1855 and 1856. The 1861 Sacramento City Directory still lists Blake & Co., consisting of Gorham Blake and W.R. Waters, but at 54 J Street. The firm apparently was dissolved in 1862, as a June 25, 1863 newspaper advertisement indicates: "Assay Office, Waters & Co. (late Blake & Co.), No. 52 J Street, Sacramento." An account in the Weekly Mounlaineer, a newspaper published in Dalles, Oregon, November 4. 1864, notes that samples of gold were sent to San Francisco from the Boise region to be analyzed in the laboratory of Professor Blake. Blake was a California pioneer, having arrived in that state comparatively early. In 1852 he was an agent of Adams & Co. at their Placerville office, according to a letter in the files of the Wells, Fargo Bank History Room, San Fran-

Gorham Blake was a native of Boston, Massachusetts and died December 17, 1897, in Oakland, California, at the age of 68 years. Among his other activities he was an organizer and member of the Sacramento Committee of Vigilance.

Until recent years, very little about Blake & Agrell or Blake & Co. appeared in numismatic publications. Curiously "Agrell" is misspelled as "Agnell" on several known pieces. Genealogical records have been searched with limited success since 1975 for information concerning John Agrell/Agnell, who was Gornam Blake's partner for only six weeks in 1855.

OFFICE.

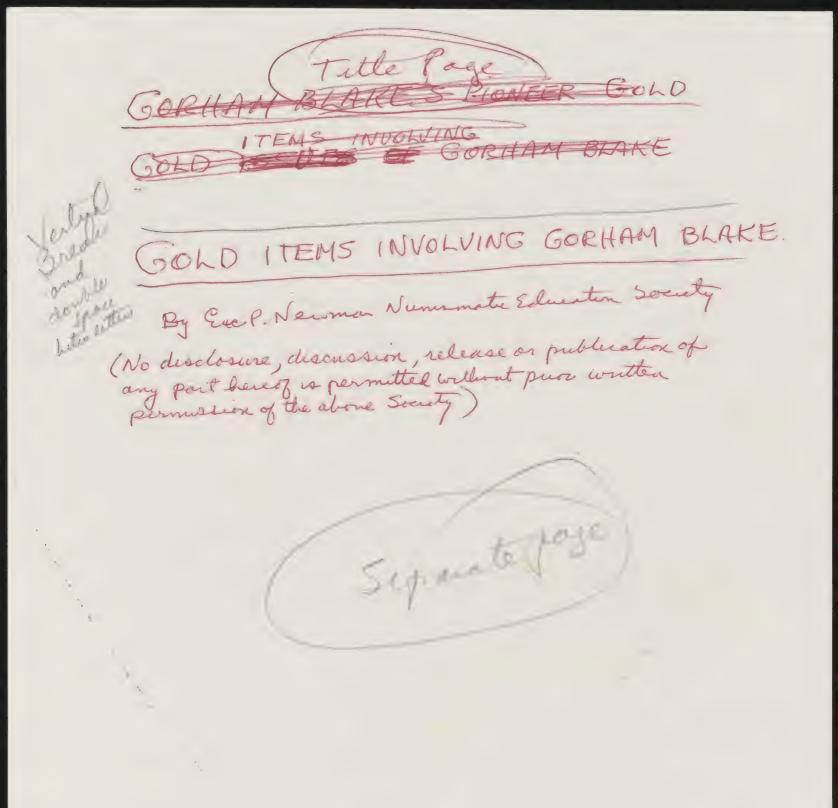
BLAKE & CO.,

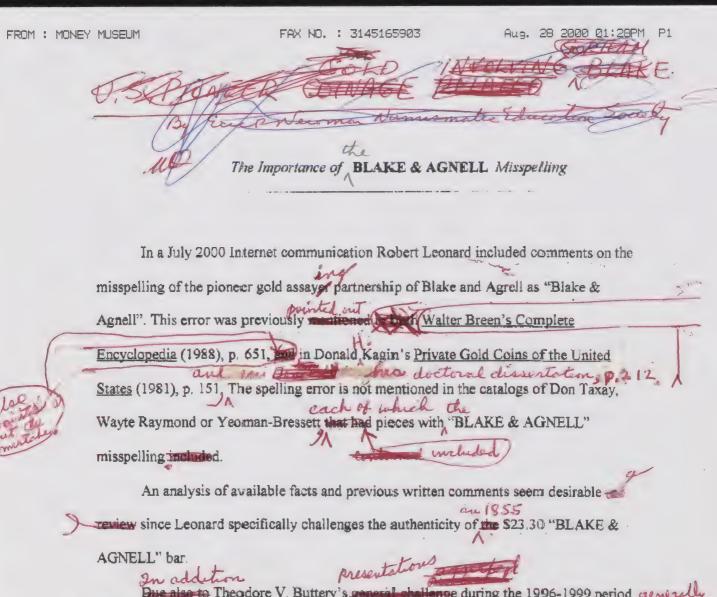
No. 52 J Street, between Second and Third, SACRAMINTO.

GOLD AND ORES OF EVERY DESCRIPTION

Melted and Assayed, and returns made within twenty-four hours, in hers or coln The Wo guarantee our Assays, and will pay all differences arising from the same with any of the U.S. Minta. Hars discounted at San Francisco rates.

1856 Sacramento Directory advertisement for Blake & Co., assayon. Earlier the firm was known as Blake & Agrell.





Theodore V. Buttery's general challenge during the 1996-1999 period generally the authenticity of a group of pioneer gold pieces appearing after 1950 and Michael epresentations during Hodder's wi the 1998-2000 period to contrary the misspelling of "BLAKE & AGNELL" on pioneer gold pieces seems significant to review.

The spelling error "Blake & Agnell" in printed text form first appeared in 1943 on page 108 of the five part studies of U.S. pioneer gold pieces written by Edgar H. Adams for the American Journal of Numismatics which studies have the been reprinted. There and no the mame Agrell was only that one use of the name Agnell by him whether spelled correctly or incorrectly Edgar H. Adams in his publication did include the 1856 \$20 circular trial coinage in copper and brass for Blake & Co. using the name in the coronet on the obverse. He was



Other than on the course and bors ender

unsware of any piece bearing the legend BLAKE & AGNELL, of any other piece bearing the name of AGNELL or AGRELL; otherwise he would have included it in his meticulous undertaking. The detail in the historical part of his text indicated his familiarity with an extensive number of sources covering western assayers, coiners, mining, etc. beginning prior to 1848 and running through the Gold Rush decode.

He obviously knew of the partnership of Blake & Agrell (composed of Gorham Blake and John Agrell) which existed for only 45 days from November 12, 1855 to December 27, 1855 according to several newspaper entries. After Blake & Agrell dissolved, a new partner, W.R. Waters was substituted by Blake for Agrell to create the firm of Blake & and there are honeyout to an any first the firm of Blake & and there are honeyout to an any first the firm of Blake & and there are honeyout to an any first the firm of Blake & and there are honeyout to an any first the firm of Blake & and there are honeyout to any first the firm of Blake & and there are honeyout to any first the firm of Blake & and there are honeyout to any first the firm of Blake & and there are honeyout to any first the firm of Blake & and there are honeyout to any first the firm of Blake & and there are honeyout to any first the firm of Blake & and there are honeyout the first the firm of Blake & and the first t

Co see known 19th century sources uniformly spell the Agrell name correctly. The misspelling in 1912 was apparently made by the typesetter mistaking "r" for "n" which could easily have taken place in transcription due to the somewhat similar written appearance whether in long hand or typewritten. Proof reading did not catch the error

A \$ 20,15 rectangular gold bar dated 1854

and with its four stamped with BLAKE &

AGNELL in raised lettering was reported proceed about

1953. The name AGRELL and was misspelled. The Sacramento Vinion newspaper

announcement that BLAKE AGRELL

idated November 12,1855 and the executive

business is over 11 months often the dated use of the minspelled mame on an 1854 dated box. The authenticity of such a bar therefore creates

due to a contradicted date of origin combined with a misspelled firm name. Donald H. Kagin recognized the inconsistency by writing, "What is a mystery, however, is the existence of an 1854 BLAKE + AGNELL Gold Ingat." (Dissertation; 221, end notes 60 and 65).

G. BLAKE, ASSAYER, 1854

In Donald Kagin's 1981 book entitled Private Gold Coins and Patterns of the United States it is stated that Gorham Blake opened an assay office in 1854 in Sacramento, California where he issued ingots bearing the name "G. Blake Assayer", p. 171. However, no such ingots or coins containing Blake's first name or initial are described, illustrated or otherwise mentioned in the book, but pieces dated 1855 and thereafter bearing the BLAKE & CO and BLAKE & AGNELL names were included. With one exception, there is no written material to our knowledge either before or after 1981 that describes, mentions, or illustrates any coin, bar, ingot, or other tangible item with Blake's first name or initial in the legend or any Blake related tangible item with an 1854 date.

That exception is the listing and illustration of a piece in the catalog of Bank Leu and Adolph Hess AG for an auction sale in Lucerne, Switzerland held October 17-18

1962, Lot # 1007, where the following description was used:

"California Gold. GORHAM BLAKE, ASSAYER Sacramento. \$ 33.68, Ingot 1854

G. BLAKE/ASSAYER/SAC. CAL. Rv. 33.68 (inkus) DOLLS. / 900 (inkus) THOUS.

/1854, in Linienviereck, 57.3 g. Unique, Extremely fine. This is the first example of Gorham Blake's name alone on an ingot and it is one of the heaviest recorded. This ingot has been in the possession of one family for at least 50 years."

The translation of the German word inkus is incuse and the word Linienviereck is rectangular.



How this unique piece is one of the heaviest recorded pieces when no other recorded pieces were known to exist is difficult to understand.

ocated as to

The only other available information of this item came from Peter D. Mitchell of A.H. Baldwin & Sons Ltd. of London in 1974. He wrote that this G BLAKE ASSAYER piece was obtained by Mr. Crowther of Spinks and Brian Grover (both English coin dealers) "from an impeccable source in the City (Godfather of one of the Queen's children and all that)." Crowther was said to have placed it in the Leu sale and then John Ford had it withdrawn as a forgery, the reason for which Grover told Mitchell was that Ford pronounced the family's letter giving details of the piece's history as false. Grover then sent the G. BLAKE ASSAYER piece to Lester Merkin, a New York City coin dealer, and it was stolen from Merkin. The piece was later recovered by the police, held for evidence, and eventually returned by Merkin to Grover in England. Grover still had possession of the piece in 1974 and promised Mitchell that he (Grover) would look for the letter from the family about the piece and send Mitchell a copy. The name of the family was never disclosed to Mitchell. The copy of the letter never appeared.

In 1962, the same year as the Swiss auction above mentioned, both Crowther and Grover were also involved in the placement and "sale" of a false St. Patrick's farthing struck in gold and inserted in an auction by Wallis & Wallis at Lewes, England at which the farthing was alleged to have brought £ 500, the highest priced coin in the history of that auctioneer. It was said to have been bought by Spink for whom Crowther worked. A request to see the underbidder's name and bid was refused by the auctioneer. That was made to try to determine whether a wash sale had occurred to create a false provenance and artificial price. Spinks sale the coin to a mery May Norwash. Thus with drawn from the Bowers of Mariena Auction of her callection held. (Lot 238) and donated to the American Mumarratic Society for study.

Numernate Association Certification perilono opinion taken the some Amue

A remarkable coincidence occurred at the above-mentioned 1962 Bank Leu auction. The only other U.S. pioneer piece in the auction other than the G. BLAKE ASSAYER piece dated 1854 was an 1853 US Assay Office \$20 gold piece with its condition described as "Fleur du Coin" or proof (Lot # 1008). This piece was one of the same variety and in the same proof-like condition (generally known as a "Franklin hoard" piece) as one which was the subject of a PNG (Professional Numismatic Guild) arbitration award in 1968 in which it was determined unanimously that the coin was not a proof and its sale as a proof was a misrepresentation justifying the return of the purchase price to the buyer by the seller. Other 1853 \$20 U.S.A.O.G. gold pieces of the have been same variety and proof-like condition were stated to be counterfeit (fake) by Richard S. Montgomery (Rick Montgomery) on page 289 of the portion written by him in the book, The Official Guide to Coin Grading and Counterfeit Detection (New York City, 1997). Montgomery is referred to in that book as president of PCGS (Professional Coin Grading Service) and "considered by many to be the number one counterfeit coin detection expert Thus it can be observed that the close association of the G BLAKE ASSAYER ingot dated 1854 and the 1853 USAOG \$20 piece in proof-like condition side by side in the same European auction catalog, being the only pieces of U.S. pioneer gold offered there might well have had some mutual prior/relationship or source. One piece was withdrawn from that auction as a fake and the other piece was strictly example declared to be a fake by an outstanding, reliable authenticator, are

¹ Two arbitrators (one appointed by Garland and one by mutual consent of the arbitrators for each party to the dispute) believed the 1853 \$20 USAOG piece was a forgery, but the third arbitrator (appointed by Ryan) did not agree. The desire to have a unanimous decision rather than a 2-1 decision was selected and thus the difference of opinion among arbitrators in the final opinion was avoided.



Aug. 28 2000 01:28PM P3

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RAYMOND CATALOGS

In The Standard Catalogue of U.S. Coins by Wayte Raymond there was no mention of either "Blake & Co." or "Blake & Agnell" pieces until the 17th edition copyrighted in 1954 and dated 1954-55. In its two page introduction to "Private Gold Issues" it is stated that "There are also a great number of patterns and so-called patterns. (some of which are undoubtedly modern) of these issues, some bearing the names of companies about which no contemporary references can be found, others being varieties of issues known to be authentic". There are included and illustrated under "Blake & Co, Sacramento 1855, 56" illustrations of two circular pieces, as follows:

(I) A coin screw press design 1855 \$20 on the obverse and a lathe turned

the numerals 20 are punched at design with BLAKE & CO ASSAYERS and 30 on the reverse weighing

507.7 grains. Its weight is 507.7 grains. It is further described as "2 known, one of these is misstruck and looped."

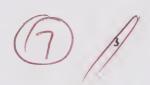
(II) A 1856 dated piece with a female head facing left with a coronet reading on the reverse is

BLAKE & CO SACRAMENTO CALIFORNIA TWENTY Don the

reverse?

The associate editor was John J. Ford, Jr. with research by Walter Breen.

In the 18th and last edition copyright 1957 the two pieces under BLAKE & CO remain the same except the comment about the 1855 dated piece is changed to "The first specimen was unearthed by John J. Ford Jr. in 1953, the second in 1954." John J. Ford.



Aug. 28 2000 01:29PM P4

Jr. 's status as to the book was described as "Editor Consultation and Supervision" while Breen was described as "Compilation and Basic Research". The word "unearthed" can be interpreted either as "archeologically located" or as "discovered" but it is not clear which was intended as no further detail was stated. Later comments by Ford indicate further confusion as the coins are said by Ford to be brought to him by Paul Franklin.

In American Com Treasurer and Hoards (1997)

by Q. David Bowers on p. 271 and in other cral

to and written statements it is said that John

supplained that found the material and I researched

and sold it " and that "Franklin was not to tell

me where he obtained his material * ** " This

leaves the the unearthed "tems in a

somewhat contradictory post status.

It can also be observed that that the John of Ford, or.

flyer soleciting western number of western American numerate
correspondence of subburges of western American numerate
related items of over the July, 1959 advertisement in the
Numeromatist by New Northwards Coin Co, are surgeste
to readers who have western Numeromatic American
that " at will pay you to deal direct " and gives
only the Wew York City address of the New Netherlands for
"offers, appearable, correspondence transactions" this
and other advertising do not mention Franklin's mame.

The foregoing contains to seems to the forest of
the material.

feature the advertisements above mentioned feature to an illustration of the #25 restangular gold bor with the & BLAKE & AGNELL misspelling.

FAX NO. : 3145165903 Aug. 28 2000 01:29PM P5

FROM: MONEY MUSEUM FA

THE RED BOOK

In the Yeoman-Bressett 9th edition of the Red Book for the year 1956 the first

"BLAKE & AGNELL" bar or ingot is included (p. 212) and consists of a piece dated

1855 with a \$23.30 value struck into it by punch. This listing remained unchanged until

the 13th edition for the year 1960 when three new pieces and some historical data were

added. The new pieces were (a) an 1855 rectangular bar or ingot with the misspelled

mane BLAKE & AGNELL and with the denomination \$25.00 die struck on the obverse,

(b) an 1855 *20 circular piece having a coin screw press on the obverse and with BLAKE

& CO. die struck upon the reverse and with the second denomination punched in on both

obverse and reverse, and (c) a mention of the 1856 \$20 circular trial piece in non
precious metal with BLAKE & CO in the coronet of the obverse. This situation

remained virtually unchanged until the 19th edition for the year 1966 when all

BLAKE & AGNELL as well as BLAKE & CO. pieces were entirely eliminated. Those

eliminated pieces have never been reinstated in the Yeoman-Bressett catalog.

this must be later checked to book when we find the book

THE TAXAY BOOK

Encyclopedia of United States Coins (Omaha 1970) Don Taxay was in continual contact with U. S. pioneer gold research and researchers. He illustrated as item 99 on plate 105 of his book an 1855 \$25 rectangular "BLAKE & AGNELL" bar but in the text description (p. 358) misdates it as 1856. He was apparently unaware of or rejected the existence of an 1855 \$50 circular "BLAKE & AGNELL" piece struck on a rectangular gold bar with circular dies or he would have described and illustrated it as he did the 1855 \$20 circular "BLAKE & CO." piece with an identical die. He was also unaware of the correct spelling of the partnership name of Blake & Agrell as he uses the name "Agnell" three times (p. 352) showing that he believed it was the correct spelling of the name. His unawareness of or rejection of the 1855 "Blake & Agnell" \$50 piece is unusual in that it had the Semi Fortunal Grand Blake & Agnell" \$50 piece is unusual in that it was or had been held by the same person indicated as expert of the 1855 \$25 rectangular "BLAKE & AGNELL" bar and one united of the 1855 \$20 circular BLAKE & CO.

pieces. (See Breen for ownership confirmation).

Taxay also stated that there were bars made in 1854 under the name GBLAKE (p.352),
ASSAYER but did not describe or illustrate any.

Taxay also stated that he knew of a number of 1856 dated "Blake & Co." assay bars (p. 352) but he did not give any source of his information or describe or illustrate any of them, possibly because these items were not coins and therefore not within the scope of his book. Whether they were of the type found in the salvage from S.S. Central America in the 1980s and 1990s or otherwise is not determinable from his work.



THE KAGIN BOOK

(p. 171) and in his dissertation (p. 212) Kagin in his Private Gold Coins publication of 1981 appears to be the first to mention the misspelling of the name Agrell as "Agnell" (p. 171) Kagin indicates the mistake of one letter on the dies might not have been practical to correct, "especially when they were a large company known by most citizens in Sacramento." He shows two dies with the "BLAKE & AGNELL" name misspelled, one for round pieces and one for rectangular pieces. None are known with the name spelled correctly or in any other way. Kagin's suggestion seems unsupported and unjustified because the partnership was only in business for 45 days altogether, which is too short a time to be "known by most citizens". The Blake name might have acquired a fine assaying reputation beginning in the Agrell name regardless of spelling was only a flicker of light and was not in assaying or known on any coins, ingots, or bars prior to the BLAKE & AGRELL partnership. Kagin for the misspelling

Further review of the matter in Kagin reveals that he lists as his K-3 variety an 1855 \$50 rectangular planchet BLAKE & CO. piece that uses a circular die with the Com screw press obverse descree (p. 281). The reverse illustration for that piece shows a "BLAKE & AGNELL" legend and does not conform to the text wording. This mistake is further compounded in his description of his K-4 variety (p. 282) which is round and he states that both the obverse and reverse are similar to his K-2 variety which is different in shape, legend and design. To add to the confusion in the description of K-3 it is stated that an uncut strip of three \$25 size ingots exists but this presumably relates to K-1 and not to K-3. Kagin also describes under the subtitle "Patterns, Die Trials & Experimental

points out as an excuse that SCHULTS was misspelled on another pioneer coin when a

terminal "S" punch was used instead of "Z".

03 Aug. 28 2000 01:30PM P8

FROM: MONEY MUSEUM FAX NO.: 3145165903

Pieces" (p. 323), a group of six Blake & Co. pieces (pp. 334-336). These consist of three unique 1855 pieces with the screw press design struck in other than gold, one 1856 \$20 circular pattern described and illustrated by Edgar H. Adams in 1913, and two unique undated rectangular white metal bars with much of its text influenced in curved lines and cancelled with large X marks scratched on the faces. None of these pieces are included in the Kagin index. Even though they do not relate to the misspelling problem directly they considered must be studied because some of them are associated by die and punch linkage to the \$50 BLAKE & AGNELL piece which does have the misspelling.

Any such inaccuracies in Kagin's book should not detract materially from his many other research findings.

(12) 8

THE BREEN ENCYCLOPEDIA

Walter Breen's Encyclopedia had the advantage of using all of the work and extensively writing of prior researchers to which he added his own. He included all of the "BLAKE & AGNELL" pieces with the warning: "if authentic" (p. 651). He specifically agreed that the Edgar H. Adams use of "BLAKE & AGNELIL" was a typographical error. He recognized the importance that "BLAKE & AGNELL" coins; bars or ingots were not known until the 1950s and concludes "strange indeed to find it (the misspelling of AGNELL) on the coins, which were unknown until the 1950s!" His astonishment in the sequence of events in having the misspelling AGNELL occur in print in 1913 and the identical misspelling being found on coins and bars in the 1950s is indicated by his use of an exclamation point at the end of his comment. Breen fer some reason omitted from his 288 encyclopedia any mention or illustration of two unique trial pieces in copper or white metal described on pp. 334-336 of Kagin's 1981 book under & Blake & Co His stated reason was " the present study makes no attempt caption. The obverse of three of these bear the 1855 date; have a circular impression to describe bullion storage ingots or patterns known to exist only showing the screw press design; and the portion of the field for punching in the denomination minerals marine and Research here is origoing of, but the most recent described in detail in Kagin. "(p. 630).

described in detail in Kagin." (p. 630). have been BLAKE & CO pieces but those of its predecessor firm for which a reverse die

The other two are rectangular bars, the obverse of each bearing the date

Breen rarely avoided stating his opinion on father than avoid that associated with pieces he listed, but to avoid the controversy he did in this instance after the warnings mentioned above.

was made with the allegedly misspelled name of BLAKE & AGNEKL in the legend.

Otherwise the alleged BLAKE & AGNELL reverse would not have had an obverse

BLAKE RELATED MATERIAL IN THE

JOSIAH K LILLY-SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION HOLDINGS

After Josiah K. Lilly died his enormous collection of gold coins was appraised by Abe Kosoff and Hans M.F. Schulman in September 1967. An Act if Congress was passed providing that the Lilly Estate would receive \$5,500,000 estate tax credit if his gold collection were donated to the Smithsonian Institution. The donation was made. The four Blake related items included were as follows:

BLAKE & AGNELL

Ingot, \$20.15. This company had its smelting and assaying plant at 52 J Street in Sacramento.

BLAKE & COMPANY

Pattern in Gold. \$20 1855. Formerly Blake & Agnell. A unique item acquired by Stack's from a Mr. F. Korff of Mesa, Arizona.

BLAKE & COMPNY

Keefer

Ingot, silver, \$3.04 Ex-Don C. Kiefer Collection

Ingot, silver, \$14.48, No. 326 Ex- Kiefer, New Netherlands Coin Co., Gerald Fox.

#

FAX NO. : 3145165903

Aug. 28 2000 01:31PM P10

FROM: MONEY MUSEUM

It can be observed that the misspelled word "Agnell" is used both as to the lettering on
the coin and in the description of the firm name. It will also be noted that the word

an alternate and cannot be construed as an
COMPANY is spelled out instead of being abbreviated, but this is only a technical error.

The existence of F. Korff of Mesa, Arizona has been extensively researched in the records for that area including telephone books, directories, licenses, land records, voting this is a severe situation. records, etc. and no such person has been found. Repeated requests from the Smithsonian Institution for a complete copy of the Lilly records have been requested for many years by several people and have not resulted in being furnished the records Efforts under the Freedom of Information Act met with a refusal on the grounds that those that they records did not belong to the Smithsonian Institution and were returned to the Estate of Josiah K. Lilly Nevertheless copies of most of those records are available in private both now deceased, those records hands. Messrs. Kosoff and Schulman also failed to cooperate in making them available. Subsequent to the Lilly transfer, a BLAKE & AGNELL strip of three \$25 size horizontal stampings (was given to the Smithsonian Institution by Emery May Norweb. There may be disting gifts of such material from others.

(15) 10/

Euriously there is no listed, mentined or lenown example of an the state circular gold coin having an obverse containing the 1855 date and with a screw press design and the having a reverse containing with concentric circles and containing with BLAKE & AGNELL ASSAYERS, each side baving a punched in 20 as a denomination.
Such a pair of dies (with the punched in \$\frac{1}{2} \] denomination) obviously existed since a cise of those dies on a rectangular box with 50 # punched in on both sides does exist. the circular # 20 coin with the would have been the same size of the U.S. HE & CO \$ 20.

gold free of the period is BLAKE & CO \$ 20.

gold coins with the using one of those dies (the obverse) with the 1855 date existed and yet BLAKE & Co was only in existence for 4 days during 1855 (December 27, 1855 to December 31, 1855). One of I those 1855 BLAKE & CO coins has a femely loop on it just as dres a James King of bort days in 1855 or early 1856 to the a BLAKE & CO die to go with an obverse dated 1855 when new dies doted 1856 to for BLAKE & CO were ordered from the last coast with a new design similar to U. S. I standard were cut and these new dies are to now through die trials productions in Ins 1912 publication . And

Second page It would have been normal for Blake & Co to continue to coin and issue 1855 dated Enough to gold coins with the BLAKE + AGNELL mame using existing dies for the part of 1856 until the newly ordered ## Blake & Co dies dated 1856 arrived in Calebornia. that exparently does not seem to have been to to since a new BLAKE+ conquerse die seems to have been but for combination with 1855 screw press obnuse die for funting Comoge grant the continued to the traction of an new reverse due only Contrined but not impossible since BLAKE 1855 were supposedly struck. The fact that

1855 were AGNELL coins dated 1855 that the situation on trived and not real.

FROM : MONEY MUSEUM FAX NO. : 3145165903 Aug. 28 2000 01:05PM

UNPUBLISHED OPINIONS OF BLAKE & AGNELL PIECES

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proof-like

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discribed herein

The New Netherlands Coin Co., Inc., proposed a first draft (no other draft known) of a report entitled Blake & Agnell Pioneer Coiners and Assayers of Sacramento, 1854-1862, and apparently sent it in 1953 to Emery May Norweb, a collector of Cleveland, Ohio, in connection with the sale by or through New Netherlands to her of a Blake & Agnell gold strip or bar dated 1855 with three separate identical stampings in a horizontal row for \$25 size gold bars and described in detail on page 3 of that report and as them 4 of Section II. on the following page of the report. The original of that report was sent to Eric P. Newman Numismatic Education Society by Henry Norweb (Musband of Emery May Norweb) on November 27, 1968 in connection with a Norweb request for an opinion on the authenticity of the above mentioned gold strip because of the research undertaken by that Society in connection with the Garland vs. Ryan arbitration involving at 1853 \$20 U.S.A.O.G. gold piece. The strip itself was also sent to that Society for study.

The New Netherlands report consists of 5 typewritten pages and is divided into two sections: (I) Historical Background and (II) the Known Issues of Blake & Agnell and Blake & Co. There are 10 pieces described in section II.

Some unusual features of that report are as follows:

(A) The name Agnell is mentioned six times as part of the lettering on numismatic items and eight additional times in descriptive language. The name Agrell is never used. There is no indication that the name Agnell was a misspelling of the name Agrell.

(B) The first name of the person referred to as Agnell is indicated as unknown although the name John Agrell is published on December 29, 1855 etc. in the Sacramento Union newspaper and otherwise .

(C) The middle initial of Gorham P. Blake is stated as newspaper content but does not seem to appear in a then current newspaper announcement in a newspaper at the times-

(D) & \$20.15 Blake & Agnell rectangular ingot dated 1854 is included Riske & Agrell("now prepared to assay") partnership was announced in the newspaper Sacramento Union as beginning on November 12, 1855. There is no newspaper or other publication of that period which uses the name Diake & Agneti or Agrell.

(E) The death of "Agnell" was said to have occurred on or about December 29, 1855 and reference was given to the publication of Edgar H. Adams (1911-1913) as the source. A dissolution of the co-partnership by "mutual consent" was announced on December 29, 1855 as of December 27, 1855 in the newspaper. Perhaps confusion came about from the publisher's inserted duration signal which added (d 28-lw)" to the end of the dissolution announcement. No such date of death is indicated in the published study of Edgar H. Adams on pioneer gold (1911-1913).



FROM: MONEY MUSEUM

FAX NO.: 3145165903

Aug. 28 2000 01:05PM P2

(988)

Breen (1987) bases his assertion of the December 29, 1855 date of death of Agrell on Kagin but Kagin's book (1981) does not mention the matter death.

(F) There is no mention of any G BLAKE ASSAYER gold bar dated 1854. This bar, as heretofore first appeared in a European auction in 1962 so New Netherlands was then familiar with it. might not have been familiar with it in 1953.

(G) The number of equidistantly spaced concentric circles on the pieces described as Nos. 5,6, and 7 are respectively 18, 21, and 28, showing that the die maker would have had available in California a finely adjustable metal lathe during the 1855 period. Even though an engine turning "machine was affectly not

(H) As to a Blake & Agnell unique \$25 rectangular ingot dated 1855 (No. 3) it is stated, "It is considered likely that other examples of this variety will turn up." This forecast is irresponsible and has a tendency to create suspicion.

(I) No discovery or source information or provenance of any item is furnished in spite of showing an extensive familiarity with pioneer gold history.

(J) It is suggested that the BLAKE & AGNELL strip of three separate horizontal stampings was already underweight to cut into three \$25 size bars and that this reject was kept as a souvenir by the assayers. The assayers could easily remelt the whole bar or cut off two full weight segments for \$25 bars. For assayers to keap a bar of that value as a souvenir with the misspelled name of AGNELL on it sees (farfetched?) (illogical?).

The opinion of the Eric P. Newman Numismatic Education Society as to the Blake and Agnell gold strip dated 1855 with three identical separate horizontal stampings was sent to the Norwebs on June 18, 1969 and contained the following major observations:

(AA) That the souvenir status of the strip because it was slightly under weight to be cut into three \$25 size pieces was unjustified because it could easily be remelted or two pieces of full weight could easily have been cut from it and the remaining underweight portion could be remelted. An assayer keeping a souvenir of that value and easily reproducible with a misspelled name on it seems to be pure hype.

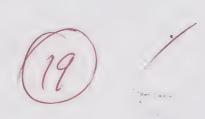
(BB) No information as to the discovery, source or provenance of the strip was furnished in the detailed report or otherwise.

(CC) It was pointed out that in the July 1959 advertisement of New Netherlands Coin Co., Inc., in <u>The Numismatist</u> that the advertisers had the "good fortune to devise a system of unearthing numerous unique pieces not previously known". Forecasting the future not only was unreliable insight but forecasting the finding of unique pieces seems not justifiable in the

(DD) The same advertisement stated that "we have handled the most fabulous items imaginable". The word "fabulous" may be an advertising puff, but fabulous means unreal.

(EE) It was pointed out that Paul Franklin and John J. Ford, Jr. for many years had a business relationship, were close friends, and lived in communities close to each other in Long Island, NY.

being tel



FROM : MONEY MUSEUM

- (FF) It was pointed out that Paul Franklin was the source of the previously unknown Parsons bar from Colorado and the source of the previously unknown Blake & Co. gold pieces struck with circular dies.
- (GG) It was pointed out that Paul Franklin testified at the Garland vs. Ryan arbitration hearings that he was a skilled machinist and he gave full technical details of his knowledge of electrotyping.
- (HH) It was pointed out that Paul Franklin refused to testify at the Garland vs.

 Ryan arbitration hearings as to the source of the 1853 \$20 U.S.A.O.G. gold coins, one of which was the coin under consideration at those hearings.
- (II) It was pointed out that John J. Ford, Jr. had told Eric P. Newman that Paul Franklin was the finest metallurgist that Ford had ever known.

There may be other unpublished opinions which are not known to the writer will come to light.

(20)

Aug. 28 2000 01:31PM P11

FAX NO. : 3145165903

FROM : MONEY MUSEUM

S.S. CENTRAL AMERICA

Publicity to date about the immense amount of bars and coins salvaged from the S.S. Central America has not mentioned any item with the name BLAKE & AGNELL or BLAKE & AGRELL or AGRELL. The Sotheby Auction of 1999-2000 included only about 8 % of the find and that portion has 15 assay bars of BLAKE & CO. The Sotheby catalog (pp. 84-87) mentions the name John Agrell in the historical section.

As to the remaining 92% of the treasure another 19 more BLAKE & CO. assay bars exist.

None so far show significantly to letter and number punchers on the BLAKE & AGNEY!

pieces which beyon to appear in the 1950s.

Codentied

PANY

there were no coins found with the name BLAKE on them. All the assay bas found contains only the mame BLAKE & CO. No salvaged pieces show any letter punches similarty to any of the punches or bars putting the name BLAKE which containing the name BLAKE which were known before the Central America recovery. There is no challenge as to the authenticity of the Central America pieces and the opportunity to salt the wrede.

(21) -19

AN EARLY NUMISMATIC COPYING ERROR Assuming that

The misspelling of BLAKE & AGRELL as BLAKE & AGNELL on the 1950s was copied from the typographical error in the 1912 Adams publication there is a comparable American numeromate situation which occurred more than a contury earlier. the creation of the U.S. Dallar dated 1804 during the 1833-1834 period has a similar order of error. Due to the misinterpretation of the U.S. Mint records contemperaneously made for 1804 Awas thought in the 1833-1834 period that U. S dollars dated 1804 had been mented in 1804, Hus dies for dollars dated 1804 were cut during the 1833-1834 period and fantasy dollars were struck from them at the U.S. Mint. Subsequent luidence showed that the U.S. records covering 180 Fondleded only these Sponish-American 8 reales dollars to U.S dollars struck from dies dated 1803 or earlier. thus the creation of dollars datel 1804 were exposed in 1962; etc. as boving been influenced during the 1833-1834 period by a misinterpretation of a routine but somewhat ambiguotts report for 1804 include was not specifically erroneous. As to both the AGNELL spelling error from each situation of the seems to confirm to seems to seems to seems to seems to seems to seems to southern the seems to see the seems t the latter date take the date of the date situation as the date of the creation of each of the fantasy pieces.

GENUINE FAKES OF BLAKE & CO.

The Chrysler Corporation in 1969 needed a gimmick to promote the introduction automobile. of the 1970 Golden Duster Valiant, It undertook to copy for that purpose an 1855 \$20 California proneer yold coincige. Blake & Co. circular piece which was the same size as the United States \$20 gold gieze. Chrysler had many, many thousands of copies reproduced in a brassy color using a por of non-precious metal. metal mixture, These were given away and avidly enjoyed by the public. by members of the public astranties Thereafter inquiries concerning their value were enormous and the tales created to support their genuineness and gold content defy the imagination. Numismatic columnists and others since then. continually have had to disappoint the many inquirers over the years. In 1976 there was litigation in Michigan over the ownership of one which was abandoned when a jeweler determined the coin had no gold content.

Some numismatists enjoyed the situation immensely because they felt that a fake truly of a fake was comical.



FAX NO. : 3145165903 Aug. 28 2000 01:33PM FROM: MONEY MUSEUM CONCLUSION, SCOPE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT The scope of the data assembled for this research project and covered by it is limited to items which include the name BLAKE and not that of other issues or issuers, not including that name specifically associated or related to BLAKE matters. There are omitted pioneer gold observations which have a more distant association or need for an independent review. If there are any statements in the foregoing data which are inaccurate or ambiguous, can be supplemented, clarified or improved upon, the writer welcomes suggestions. If the project should be enlarged to include other pieces of pioneer gold the material for such items can be assembled individually or as a team effort. Thanks are due to many who have over a long period of time shared their information with the writer and it is hoped that they and others will continue to do so. Those who have preferred for whatever reason to hold out information in the past are welcome to furnish it at any time.



CONCLUSION

The chances of Edgar H. Adams in 1913 having his publication contain a spelling error identical to a spelling error in 1855 on coins and bars which Adams had never seen or heard of is virtually nil. A chronological copying order of an error of this type seems to become a logical conclusion since the 1913 spelling error came first and copying that error in the 1950s was an logical event occurring long afterward. Copying mistakes are often a proof of plagiarism or other improprieties as well as reliance upon previously published material. Whermaters.

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conchusion, scope de!

America does anyone wish to purchase on an "as is the name BLAKE upon it?

AN UNKNOWN 1849 AMERICAN GOLD COIN COUNTERFEIT DECTECTOR APPEARS

By

Eric P. Newman

An unusual type of American mechanical gold coin counterfeit detector, designed and produced at the end of 1849, has been recently discovered. Only a hint of its possible existence has been available but that had been unrecognized. This is not unlike learning that an "extinct" species of animal is very much alive. The newly located detector is distinctive in that it incorporates one swinging arm to accommodate some denominations of U.S. gold coin while the balance beam to which that arm is attached accommodates the others. To understand the unique status of this device we first look at its predecessors

During the American colonial period and well into the first half of the 19th century in the United States equal arm balances in a pocket-sized box or case were used to test the weight of foreign coins in circulation. The results were compared to charts and tables specifying proper coin weights. The only other protections against counterfeits were careful observation and a simple vibration test (that is, a coin was either balanced and tapped or spun on a hard surface to check if it had a ringing sound.) Casting, alloying and plating steadily became more sophisticated and thus improved accuracy in testing became necessary. A counterfeit composed of other metals could also be increased in size (either diameter or thickness) to produce a proper weight thus attempting to deceive the tester.

Mechanics, primarily in England in the early 19th century, had developed a pocket-sized brass balance containing two holders for gold coins cut into the balance beam at proper distances on one side of the fulcrum and a fixed counterweight on the other side. The moment 1 created by either denomination of a genuine gold coin being tested would be the same and would balance the counterweight. Horizontal, circular holders of the exact circumference of a genuine coin were countersunk into the balance beam to test the diameter. A slot equal in width to the thickness of the genuine coin was cut across the diameter of each coin holder so that thickness could be checked. This was called a "slot gauge". A chord, or arc, was cut away from part of the circumference of each coin holder on opposite sides of the balance beam so that a coin could easily be lifted out of the holder with one's fingers. The fulcrum on which the balance beam rested was mounted on a brass base and such a device was called a "rocker" because of its seesaw movement on the fulcrum. ²

The first American counterfeit coin detector (any mechanical detector is hereafter referred to as a CCD) copied all such English principles and was produced in 1834 by T. Moore of Philadelphia to test the U.S. \$2.50 and the \$5 of the new size and weight (III-2-4).³ This device did not contain a holder for a U.S. \$10 because no \$10 U.S. gold coin had been struck since 1804 and other U.S. gold coins from earlier years had been withdrawn from normal circulation by banks and the public because their intrinsic value was higher than their face value. The Moore CCD was made with and without the name of the maker punched onto the counterweight. Sometimes the word PATENT appeared on the base even though no patent was ever issued. It measured about 3.90 inches in length and about 0.80 inches in height so it readily fit into one's pocket or pouch.

Just prior to the major discoveries of gold were made in California in 1848, only three denominations of U.S. gold coinage had been struck: the \$2.50 (quarter eagle), the \$5 (half eagle), and the \$10 (eagle). When large quantities of California gold became available for U.S. coinage Congress authorized the Mint to add \$1 and \$20 denominations pursuant to the Act of March 3, 1849. At that time foreign gold coins circulated extensively in the United States, and counterfeiting and tampering had become a major problem. The modest amount of U.S. gold coins then in circulation was not substantially targeted. But when U.S. gold coinage was to increase greatly and foreign gold coins in American circulation were to phase out, immediate and improved protection was needed against counterfeit and underweight U.S. gold coins.

In 1849 however, the size of any new CCD became a problem because of the need to accommodate the five different denominations of gold coinage (\$20, \$10, \$5, \$2.50, and \$1) which were or were about to be in circulation.⁴ The double eagle was 20 times the weight of the \$1 gold piece. In order to use a rocker device similar to Moore's or that of an English type, the distance of the center point of the \$1 coin holder would have to be 20 times farther from the fulcrum than the center point of the \$20 coin holder to provide the same moment for balancing a full weight genuine coin. That would require a balance beam of about 15 inches in length (obviously, to reduce beam length the \$20 coin holder would be positioned as close to the fulcrum as practical.) Making a pocket-size CCD similar to the previous rocker types seemed unworkable. It was realized that placing the coin holders on both sides of the fulcrum would require an adjustable counterweight or a sliding or separate weight. Beginning in the 18th century the English had successfully employed a single coin shelf on one side of the fulcrum for weighing one of several gold

denominations and attached on the top of the counterweight side of the fulcrum a small, swinging arm (or arms) on a horizontal hinge, enabling the moment for balancing to be changed manually by turning over one or more swinging arms 180 degrees on the hinge pin or pins. Any such arm was commonly called a "turnover" or a "turn". Several American mechanical designers during the period of 1849-1850 attempted to solve the American gold coin testing problem in different ways. A rocker for only the \$20 coin was produced (III-2-12); K & G Howard of Philadelphia made a rocker limited to testing the \$5, \$2.50, and \$1 denominations (III-2-17 and C 9); W.N. Snider, a machinist who worked for the U.S. Mint in Philadelphia, made a countertop size gold coin scale for all five denominations using thickness and diameter slots end to end along the center line of one side of the balance beam thin flexible metal straps beneath the slots to support the coin in a vertical position, and on the other side of the balance beam a poise suspended on a hangar was manually movable along the beam's marked denominational notches for testing the coin's weight; and John Allender of New London, Connecticut, cut the three smaller denomination coin cavities into the beam on one side of the fulcrum and the two larger denomination coin cavities into the beam on the other side of the fulcrum, but had to add a separate counterweight to fit into the \$1 coin holder when the larger denomination coins were tested (II-2-9, etc.). Allender's device was about 8.50 inches long, being somewhat larger than the desired pocket size (II-2-9, etc.).

The newly discovered CCD with some coin holders on its one swinging arm then appeared and its maker was identified only with a capital "H" punched in the top of that arm. I attribute it to George Howard for the following reasons:

- (a) The CCD punched with K & G HOWARD PHIL is very similar in shape and workmanship.
- (b) The name of G. Howard is first listed in Philadelphia directories in 1845 as a machinist at Broad and Paper Streets. In later listings the name became George Howard and then George C. Howard.
- (c) However, there is no K. Howard listed in Philadelphia directories but he may have been an older relative of George Howard.
- (d) George Howard must have been very ingenious because he broadened the scope of his occupation to "mechanical engineer" as his business grew and he soon occupied three lots on South 18th Street below Market Street. He advertised in 1862 as a maker of tools for machinists, factories, railroad repair yards, etc. His listings ceased in 1880.

Allender demonstrated his familiarity with the newly discovered CCD when he commented in his March 26, 1850 patent application:

"I am aware that balances for proving coin have been made with two levers hung upon one fulcrum so arranged as to weigh all the coins upon one side of said fulcrum, and when the larger coins were weighed the lever in which the small ones are weighed is turned to the opposite side of the fulcrum. Therefore I make no claim to instruments constructed with more than one lever and to weigh upon one side of the fulcrum only."

There are some technical ambiguities in Allender's language attempting to distinguish his device:

- (a) Two separate levers could be hung side by side on one fulcrum with different coin holders and would operate independently of one another.
- (b) A swinging arm attached to or laying on top of a basic lever is only a part of a lever and not a lever itself.

(c) When a swinging arm is turned to the opposite side of the fulcrum the arm merely changes the movement on both sides and is still a part of the basic lever and performs no independent leverage.

What Allender intended to say was that he was not claiming originality of a swinging arm which enabled and required coins to be tested only on one side of the fulcrum but that his method was for testing some denominations on one side of the fulcrum and other denominations on the opposite side of the fulcrum.

Allender's description of the earlier device was repeated unchanged in the language of the patent issued to him on November 27, 1855 (II-2-9A and IV-1-26). This description obviously referred to the George Howard CCD that has recently appeared. The George Howard CCD was and is revolutionary and distinctive because the swinging arm containing two of the smaller size coin holders transfers balance beam weight from one side of the fulcrum to the other. The swinging arm turns on earlier English detectors were small and were placed and remained after movement only on one side of the fulcrum and never contained any coin holders. When the swinging arm of the George Howard CCD has its smaller-size coin holders facing upward, it covers some of the other coin holders on the balance beam below so that they are then blocked from use for testing. When that arm is swung over on its hinge across the fulcrum, its weight changes from one side of the fulcrum to the other and exposes the larger coin holders for use in testing. The hinge is attached to the balance beam almost over the top of the fulcrum.

Therefore the weight of the swinging arm of the George Howard CCD had to be arranged with precision because it performed a function on each side of the fulcrum. It is

reasonably easy to adjust the moment of a balance beam by reducing the side that is too heavy by filing or buffing off some of its undersides, but in the case of a swinging arm that is too light the procedure becomes complicated. If one adjusts the counterweight side of the beam on which the arm sometimes resits a further adjustment of the beam on the larger coin holder side may be required. The weight of brass used for casting parts could not be relied upon because the countersinking of coin holders and the cutting of slot gauges and finger cut outs resulted in substantial weight changes.

Thus, obtaining weight perfection for the arm by careful handiwork was delicate, increasing cost. To reduce the beam length, the George Howard CCD crowded the \$20 coin holder close to the fulcrum, causing the \$10 coin holder to overlap the \$20 coin holder and the slot gauges to be cut on the diagonal instead of along the center line of the beam.

Frederick Meyers (or Meyer, Myer or Myers) of Philadelphia apparently promptly undertook to improve the George Howard CCD by making the beam shorter; eliminating the overlap of the \$10 coin holder over the \$20 coin holder; and realigning the position of the diagonal slot gauges (III-2-13, etc.). This was accomplished by adding a second swinging arm to accommodate the \$5 coin holder and remove it from its position on the balance beam. The second swinging arm was on the same hinge pin that held the first swinging arm containing the \$2.50 and \$1 coin holders. The balance beam was shortened to accommodate only the \$20 and \$10 coin holders. This enabled the position of the \$20 coin holder to be distanced from the fulcrum enough to eliminate the overlap of the \$10 coin holder. Because Meyers' CCD had transferred the position of the \$5 coin holder from the beam to a second swinging arm, the length of his device was

shorter than Howard's by about one inch. A more complex and desirable CCD was the result but it required even more labor and production adjustments than the George Howard CCD.

Meanwhile Allender stressed the low cost of his CCD. He could have added a simple turnover without any coin holder on it to take the place of the separate weight he used, since there was adequate open space to do so on the smaller coin side of the balance beam between the \$2.50 and \$1 coin holders. He chose not to pursue that option obviously because he was concerned about the production cost. In his patent application filed March 26, 1850, he stated:

"This apparatus can be made and sold cheaper than any other that will perform the same service with the same facility."

This cost factor is independently confirmed by a letter from the United States Mint to the U.S. Patent Office dated January 10, 1855 (IV-1-17), in which it is stated with respect to the price paid by the Mint for an Allender CCD: "The cost was trifling."

It is clear that the production costs of the George Howard CCD and Meyers CCD were far in excess of the cost of the Allender CCD. Allender continually sold quantities of his device. For 1854 coinage he added a second size to the \$1 coin holder in a concentric position and a side positioned \$3 coin holder. For those who had purchased his detectors before the \$3 denomination was coined he sold a brass bushing to fit into the \$5 coin holder to enable \$3 pieces to be tested. He also changed the punched in lettered text on the beam from time to time. His remarkable products are in many collections today.

The George Howard CCD and the Meyers CCD are the only examples known of each device. This indicates that the public chose the Allender CCDs because of their price, even though they were too long to be carried easily in one's pocket and in spite of

the fact that the separate weight was often mislaid or lost. The unique existence of the George Howard CCD and the Meyers CCD also indicates that very few of them were either made or sold. As is said in the medical profession," The operation was a major success but the patient died".

The reasons for and dates of production of many of the foregoing CCDs are confirmed by Jacob R. Eckfeldt and William E. Dubois, assayers at the U.S. Mint, in their publications from 1849 through 1852 as follows:⁵

"As the balance is not a very portable or ready apparatus, several instruments have been contrived expressly for the purpose of combining the tests of weight and dimensions. They are all no doubt worth examining."

When a writer states that something is unknown or unique it must be understood that his conclusions may be in error and that one or more examples may exist or are known by others. Should this be the case I will accept such corrections with thanks.

Nevertheless, on a "scale" of 1 to 10, the George Howard and Meyers counterfeit coin detectors seem to be a 12 because they are so amazingly clever and distinctive. No other swinging arms containing coin holders have been found in any CCDs anywhere else attached to balance beams. The newly found George Howard CCD can now take its place in American numismatic, metrological and Gold Rush history.

Sincere appreciation is expressed to my friend Donald Gorlick for bringing the George Howard CCD to my attention and recognizing its significance; to my son Andrew E. Newman for making it available for my study; and to James Rhodes, Thomas Serfass and Mark Rabinowitz for digital photography and assistance; and to Barbara Gregory and Ruth Willard for masterful editing.

² For English antecedents see Michael A. Crawforth, <u>Sovereign Balances</u>, (England, 1983)

⁴ The \$10 denomination had been resumed in 1838 and the \$3 denomination was not authorized until February 21, 1853.

Because the word "moment" has various meanings the use of the word *moment* herein means " a tendency to produce motion about an axis " such as a fulcrum and that the mathematical formula for a *moment* is the product of the mass (or weight) multiplied by the distance of the center of gravity of the mass from the fulcrum.

³ Eric P. Newman and A. George Mallis, U.S. Coin Scales and Mechanical Counterfeit Coin Detectors (St. Louis, 1999). The part, section and page numbers are in parentheses in the text.

⁵ See: Supplement to the Manual of Coins and Bullion (Philladelphia, Dec. 1849), p. 232; New Varieties of Gold and Silver Coins, First edition (Philladelphia 1850), p. 36; Second edition (New York, 1851), p. 12; and Third edition (New York, 1852), p. 12

POSSIBLE INTERNAL HEADINGS FOR NEWMAN ARTICLE

Page 2	¶1	FIRST DETECTOR FOR U.S. GOLD COINAGE
Page 3	¶ 1	IMPACT OF INCREASED U.S. GOLD COINAGE
Page 4	¶ 1	AN UNUSUAL DETECTOR IS INVENTED
Page 8	¶1	EMPHASIS ON LOW COST